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MOBERLY BELL AND HIS TIMES

**BOOKS BY
BENNET COPPLESTONE**

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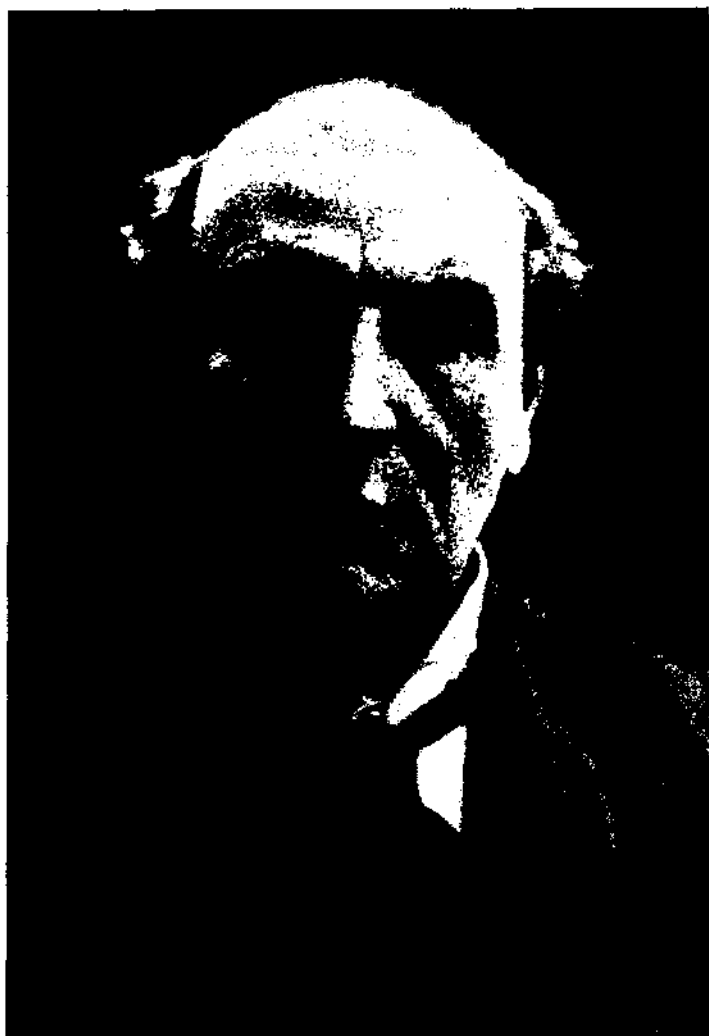


Photo. by Mr. G. C. Beresford

MOBERLY BELL IN 1908

[Frontispiece]

MOBERLY BELL AND HIS TIMES

AN UNOFFICIAL NARRATIVE

BY

F. HARCOURT KITCHIN

("BENNET COPPLESTONE")

"He was verry good to me, he was"
Jo, in "Bleak House"



LONDON
PHILIP ALLAN & CO.
QUALITY COURT

1925

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IN MEMORY OF
A
FIRST-CLASS FIGHTING MAN

Fortunam Priami cantabo et Mobile Bellum

‘Punch,’ March 25th, 1908

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CHAPTER I

MOBERLY BELL IN HIS DEN

THE Manager's Room at Printing House Square, far removed from the editorial quarters, was situated, in the days of which I write, in that part of the buildings which adjoined the private house of the Walters. It was approached by the main entrance in the Square itself, above which has been built into the wall a commemorative tablet setting forth the services of *The Times* to the City of London upon an occasion of bygone moment. One mounted a flight of wooden stairs, at the top of which a door stood wide open.

Moberly Bell sat with his back to the wall facing this open door, in front of him a big roll-top desk. At the sound of a step upon the threshold of his room he would thrust his great head round a corner of the desk, and glare upon the intruder like some lion disturbed at his meal. His eyes gleamed with that alert combative challenge which is happily rendered in the photograph which forms the frontispiece of this book. If the intruder were unauthorised and undesired, the jaws of Moberly Bell would snap, and then one would hear the hurried scramble of flying feet down that wooden stair-

case. But if he who entered through that ever open door were welcome, even though unexpected, the lion's eyes would soften and a delightful welcoming smile break the clean line of the firm lips. When I first knew Moberly Bell he wore a ragged moustache, but later on he shaved clean and so remained, with his fine humorous mouth fully revealed, until the day of his death.

Even in my early days of the 'nineties I felt the significance of that ever open door, in front of which Moberly Bell worked at his desk. He was a proud man, with the splendid hauteur of a fighter who scorns all the defences which less combative men set about them as a guard against surprisal. He was like a knight of old who placed a shield without his tent for the convenience of challengers who dared to strike it with their sharp spear points. There was no secretary's room, established as a defensive outwork, to warn Moberly Bell of the approach of an enemy and to hold that enemy in check. He sat there before his open door, wholly unprotected save by his high spirit and his joyous love of battle for its own sake. It meant a great deal for the lowly ones of Printing House Square that access to the great manager—we always called Moberly Bell 'the Manager,' heedless of his titular designation as the 'Assistant' to the Governing Proprietor—that access was never denied to them, on sufficient cause being shown. And more often than not, unless he were absorbed in one of those long fighting letters which he loved to write with his own hand, or unless he were talking as he loved to talk

through the telephone, he would welcome us and invite us to come in with that challenging glare gone from his eyes and a winning smile playing about his lips. But from all his photographs—and I selected that frontispiece from a dozen or more which Mrs. Moberly Bell very kindly placed at my disposal—there shines the light of challenge.

This accessibility of his, tempered by the snap of the savage jaws when an intruder really was an intruder, involved for him severe penalties. A great part of his working day—which was unrestricted by any formal hours—was occupied by visitors, by telephone calls, and by those unending letters of which there must be thousands buried now in the copying books of his Grand Viziership in Printing House Square. Many of his interviews with callers were of the highest importance, which only he could have held, but many others could have been taken from him by a competent secretary or by a deputy manager. Many of the telephone conversations, in which he delighted, and perhaps three quarters of his daily letters, might with great relief to his time and energies have been entrusted to lesser men. But I am quite sure that in the 'nineties, and in the early years of the new century, no secretary—and no deputy manager—would have been permitted by Moberly Bell to relieve him of a fraction of the work which he loved. He was one of those men who always want to do everything themselves, the small things no less ardently than the great things. A show run by Moberly Bell could not be other than a one

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man show. He simply could not delegate his functions—he had no scrap of an idea of how to set about it—and in all his attempts at organisation this cardinal defect appears. He did not, and could not from the very nature of him, perceive that no one man could manage *The Times* by himself any more than one man could edit *The Times* by himself. Buckle the Editor, though he possessed few of the natural gifts of the organiser of a great business, drew nearer to the heart of the matter than ever did Moberly Bell. For Buckle delegated to Moberly Bell himself most of the details of editorial management, and allowed to his assistant editors and departmental advisers a large measure of individual responsibility. Moberly Bell would delegate nothing which he could possibly keep to himself. When in 1908-9 I was assistant manager to him—as Managing Director—I had no clearly defined functions. I just tore out of Bell's hands everything which I could, and told him what I had done after it had been done. It was with difficulty that I persuaded him to read copies of the letters which I had despatched in his name. He would glare at me, say that I had exceeded my authority—which was, or was not, very often what I dared to make it—and then laugh. "I always told you, Kitchin," he would say, "that I was an impossible man to work with."

In this book I am drawing the portraits of men as men, in their strength and in their weakness. I am writing not as an 'official biographer' but as a novelist, who for once is writing the truth as he saw it and not

fiction as he may have imagined it. I am now drawing Moberly Bell as I am sure he would have loved to be drawn. "Paint me, Kitchin," I can hear him say, with Cromwell of old, "paint me with my warts." And for the portrait which I draw, whether it be true or false, I alone am responsible.

Among the few characteristic letters of his which I had the gumption to keep—I foolishly destroyed most of them as they were received—is one dated July 1907, at a time when the coming events were already casting their shadows over Printing House Square. A change of proprietary was impending by order of the Court of Chancery—though it had not yet been formally delivered—and it had been agreed between us that I was to become his chief assistant. This letter so clearly reveals his own consciousness of his defects in the capacity to delegate that I quote some passages here :

"I think I'm a bad man to help. I have not the genius of throwing work on to other people, but perhaps you can teach me and I'm quite willing to try. The fact is, I want more time for 'pottering'—for comparing *The Times* with other papers which now I never see—for reading more closely *The Times* itself. I have by no means too much *to do*, but I have little time *to think*. If only someone could see the people who come to see me, or do half the talking over the telephone. Meanwhile—enjoy your holiday and employ part of it in devising a scheme for increasing the circulation."

That last sentence was as characteristic of Bell as was the earlier part. That was his one great obsession,

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which absorbed him by day and by night : a scheme which would increase the circulation of *The Times*. All his schemes between 1902 and 1908 were inspired by that one ever present necessity ; how to increase the circulation. All the editorial reforms in which he collaborated with Buckle were directed towards this one essential end. For Moberly Bell knew—and the knowledge turned his blood cold—that *The Times* of his boundless devotion was dying at the heart for want of circulation. It was perishing of newspaper anaemia.

Moberly Bell's passion for telephoning always prevented me from taking many calls off his hands. Most men like to get away from their offices at some time, but Bell was not happy unless he had a telephone instrument at his bedside so that he could ring up the Square at any time in the night up to about four a.m. At first he used an ordinary extension from the public line, but later, when Lord Northcliffe—who also loved telephones—suggested that a private wire should be laid on from Printing House Square to Park Crescent, Moberly Bell leaped at the idea and turned his house into a miniature exchange.

He never could be commonplace. Every letter of his, even the most rapid scribble, had some flavour in it of the man's wit. I always remember with joy a stock reply of his which was sent out to those who grumbled because *The Times* would not guarantee the advertisers in its columns. They seemed to think that the advertisements published by *The Times* should be as impartially accurate as its news. Bell's stock

answer ran somewhat as follows: "We always reject the advertisements of those whom we know to be disreputable, and take care that no announcements in our columns shall be blasphemous, libellous, or indecent. But it is quite impossible for us to guarantee our advertisers. For example: If a woman advertises for a situation and states that she is a Good Plain Cook, it is clearly beyond the power of *The Times* to guarantee that she is either Good or Plain."

Moberly Bell suffered the accident which shortened one leg, and left him with a permanently rigid ankle, in the Egyptian War of the early 'eighties. He was the correspondent of *The Times*, and one evening, when running across the rails to catch a troop train, his left foot was caught in the railway points and twisted right round. In the operation which followed it was held necessary to remove the *astragalus*, the bone which together with the leg bones forms the hinge of the ankle joint. With a touch of that sardonic humour which was characteristic of him, Moberly Bell rescued his *astragalus* from the surgeons, and had it mounted as the handle of a walking stick. "I will make my *astragalus* work for me somehow," said he, grimly. He walked with the long swift stride of a man who had delighted in walking in his youth, and the huge weight of his body thrown upon his one sound foot made a sore torture of it. His feet, always too small for the weight which they were required to carry, gave out when one had become permanently stiff and the other was called upon to do a double shift of work. The

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want of sufficient bodily exercise which his lameness compelled had its consequences in impaired health. His body, big and strong though it looked, was far less strong than the ardent spirit which it housed. Many a time when I have watched him closely I have felt that he would not make old bones, yet it came to me with the shock of an epoch abruptly ended when, far off in Glasgow, I learned of his sudden death in his office chair at the age of sixty-four.

CHAPTER II

AN OUTWORN CONSTITUTION

MOBERLY BELL was the titular 'Assistant Manager' to the Governing Proprietor of *The Times* from 1890 to 1908, and thereafter Managing Director under the Northcliffe régime until in April 1911 he died at Printing House Square. All through those eighteen years from 1890 to 1908 he fought a gallant unsparing fight to save the newspaper which he loved from the fate which ultimately overtook it—the sale to outside interests. It was a daily fight unrelieved by week-ends or by adequate holidays. His work was his life, and I have never known him to be away on leave for more than a few days.

This book is the story of that fight as I watched it. My part was that of a humble looker-on. But it so happened that my intimate personal association with Bell from 1904 onwards made me conversant with every detail of importance. None of those who were engaged as principals on the business side remain. Moberly Bell himself, Lord Northcliffe, Kennedy Jones, Horace Hooper of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Arthur Walter the governing proprietor, and Godfrey

Walter, manager of the Walter Printing Business, are all dead. None remain except the Looker On, who alone among living men is able to tell the dramatic story in the fashion in which it deserves to be told. Time heals all wounds of the body and of the spirit. Moberly Bell suffered wounds, deep bitter wounds, which I at his side, and knowing his devotion so ill-requited, and loving the man as I had found him, felt almost as deeply as he did. But though the memory remains, the bitterness has passed.

Seeing that the major part of Bell's interminable administrative difficulties arose directly out of the constitution of *The Times* and ended only when that constitution was dissolved by order of the Court of Chancery, and, moreover, seeing that the sale to the Northcliffe interests arose not from immediate financial urgency but through the disabilities of the constitution, it is necessary to make plain just what it was.

There were in Printing House Square three distinct properties and two distinct sets of proprietors, who, though they overlapped as individuals, yet remained in water-tight compartments as owners. The three properties were: *The Times* as a newspaper with its subsidiary publications; the buildings in which the newspaper was housed and carried on; and the contract for printing the paper together with the plant for printing. Nowadays all these three properties in all newspapers are under one ownership and one management. In my day, and until 1908, they were at *The Times* under two ownerships and three managements.

This was by no means a trinity in unity, for the interests of the two ownerships were widely different. If it had not been for the rather precariously binding cement of the Walter interest in the two ownerships and the three managements, the old *Times* could not have endured for a month.

The buildings were the private freehold property of the Walter family, of which the life interest was in the hands of Mr. Walter, the head of that family, and Mr. Godfrey Walter, his half brother. The perpetual contract for printing the paper and the ownership of all the printing plant—and incidentally the appointment of all caseroom and machine hands and so on—was in the hands of these two Walters, as co-partners. The management of the printing office, and of all that pertained to it, was vested in my day in Mr. Godfrey Walter.

Thirdly, there was the copyright of *The Times* as a newspaper, the goodwill in fact of the newspaper as a going concern ; this was owned not by a company but by an association of private partners who individually had all the rights and liabilities of private partners, and who had inherited a trust established by the first John Walter. This partnership of owners of the copyright—among whom Mr. Walter's interests were considerable though by no means predominant (about one eighth)—owned nothing else, not a stick or brick of the buildings, not a fount of type, not a spanner in the machine room. Had not the partners in the purely newspaper ownership constituted Mr. Walter, one of

their number, Governing Proprietor and Hereditary Manager, the newspaper could not have been carried on at all. As it was, the horrible defects in the constitution, the fatal duality of ownerships, worked tolerably well for so long as the newspaper earned profits. But the moment it ceased to earn profits, and losses had to be faced, then the defects in the constitution, which had been papered over, yawned like chasms. For the partners in the ownership of the newspaper, though they had abandoned their rights in the management of their property to Mr. Walter, could not also abandon their liabilities. They were, as I came to understand the position, jointly and severally liable, just as are any other private partners in any other enterprise. It was because the private partners took fright that their joint and several liabilities in the old *Times* as a newspaper came under the protection of the Court of Chancery. That court judicially directed the partnership to be dissolved and *The Times* to be sold. Of this I shall tell in its place.

We shall see how this ancient constitution of *The Times*, which had grown up out of the foundation of the *Daily Universal Register* by the first John Walter in 1785, came to influence more and more the conduct of the newspaper as a daily publication. Mr. Walter, the hereditary manager, called to his aid as 'assistant manager' Charles Frederick Moberly Bell, who had been resident in Egypt for twenty-one years and had there acted as correspondent of *The Times*. In similar fashion Mr. Walter's father, the third John Walter,

had Mowbray Morris, and later J. C. Macdonald, as his assistant managers. Though Moberly Bell was a great and distinguished personality and all the ordinary details of daily management were left to him, yet Mr. Walter was the manager-in-chief to whom all matters of importance had to be submitted. As the fortunes of *The Times* became more and more precarious Moberly Bell became more and more the predominating influence in its destinies. He towered, and beside him the form of Mr. Walter—a modest kindly gentleman—seemed to shrink. Nevertheless, Mr. Walter could at any moment that he chose override Moberly Bell's plans. It was no fault of Mr. Walter that the great place in the world which he had inherited proved too big for him. It would have been too big for most men of his birth and training. *The Times* was the most famous public institution of its kind in the world, and year by year *The Times* was going further down that perilous declivity which always yawns in the path of great hereditary businesses which do not move with the moving world.

The constitution of *The Times*, with its hereditary manager in the head of the Walter family and its powerful assistant manager, brought about relations between the management and editorial sides which in themselves might have been fatal to success. There had at one time been a tradition of official hostility between the management and editorial sides. Bell used to tell me that Mowbray Morris and Delane were frequently not on speaking terms ; that they conducted

The Times of their day much as Lord Rosebery and Sir William Harcourt conducted the government of 1894-1895. But in those days *The Times* had no serious rival, it was the newspaper in London of largest as well as of most influential circulation, and could run itself though editor and manager fought with one another behind the scenes. But in my day, and for twenty years before my day, *The Times* had most serious rivals. *The Morning Post* and *The Daily Telegraph* had taken from it most of its small advertisements—the ‘ Situations ’ and ‘ Wants ’ of which every newspaper manager knows the value—and with its price of threepence it found life hard in daily competition with strong and rising newspapers at one penny. Happily, this tradition of hostility between the management and the editor’s room was of the past. Moberly Bell the actual Manager, and Buckle the Editor, worked together as twin skippers, or as skipper and chief engineer ; I don’t quite know how to describe by analogy their relations the one to the other. But I can tell what they were.

In the full sense of the word, the Editor of *The Times* did not in practice discharge the functions of a sole editor. The full editorship—the kind of editorship which I held for seven years in Glasgow—was in commission between Buckle and Moberly Bell. Buckle’s chief interests lay in home and foreign politics and political news, in leading articles, and in those ‘ Letters to the Editor ’ which then, as now, were of the very life-blood of *The Times* as a newspaper. Buckle

controlled the political views and expressions of opinion of *The Times*, but the whole of the staff, both editorial and management, was in the hands of Moberly Bell.

All the foreign correspondents, all the 'owns' and 'specials,' were appointed and controlled by Moberly Bell. No doubt Buckle retained a powerful voice in their selection and direction, but they were Moberly Bell's meat. They were by far the most expensive items, with their exuberant telegrams, in the outgoings of *The Times* as a newspaper. The whole of the editorial staff was appointed and paid by Moberly Bell. We took our immediate instructions from Buckle, but we looked to the approval of Moberly Bell for our chances of promotion. One could see how Moberly Bell's early experiences as *The Times* correspondent in Egypt coloured his influence over the foreign side of the paper. In his eyes foreign news was inestimably more important than home news. He lavished labour and money on 'own' and 'special' correspondents—a 'special' might be almost anyone, but an 'own' in Paris, Berlin or Vienna, was a field marshal in journalism—and paid scarcely any attention to home events. The result was that the home news, starved of money, was by comparison defective—except in parliamentary reports, law, and politics—while the foreign news was lavish and very good indeed of its peculiar kind. There has not, since the year of crisis, 1908, been anything in London journalism to compare with the range, the quality, and the impartiality of the foreign news of the old *Times*.

It had, however, two defects arising out of its superb qualities. It appealed to no more than a small, highly cultivated circle of readers, and its daily cost was prohibitive. Moberly Bell never wavered in his devotion to the foreign news page, which we called 'Latest' because it always had been labelled as the latest intelligence. He had the full support of Buckle the editor and of Mr. Walter the governing proprietor. The policy of concentrating attention and money upon foreign news may have been sound—I cannot claim to be a judge of these high matters—but it was a policy which cost far more than *The Times* under its then constitution could afford to provide.

CHAPTER III

MY ENTRY INTO THE LION'S DEN

It was the pressure of an inexplicable ambition of mine to become an editor—inexplicable on any ground of heredity or of early training—which drove me in March 1895 to the den of Moberly Bell and gave me courage to storm the passive defences of the City Office of *The Times*. I left Cambridge in 1889 and proceeded to turn my facility for mathematics—I was a Wrangler—into a highly useful engine of commerce. For a couple of years or so my mathematics made a school-master of me. As a tutor at the now defunct Oxford Military College—many of the papers and institutions which served my purpose in old days had a short life—it was my privilege to teach mathematics to the now eminent Sir Eric Geddes. Years afterwards at the Board of Trade I communicated this scrap of autobiography to Sir Auckland Geddes, the then President. “I am quite sure,” said he laughing, “that you did not knock any mathematics into Eric’s skull.” As a matter of fact I didn’t, though he seems to have got on all right without them.

Then, after my spell of school teaching, I had a brain

wave which was as enduring in its influence upon my life as that early ambition at the age of fifteen to become an editor and a novelist. It flashed across my mind that school teaching was a blind alley occupation, and that my potent engine of mathematics might be made to do better work for me in another direction. So I put my name down at the Institute of Actuaries and passed the first and second professional examinations without any trouble. I knew no one in the City of London to help me to a job with a life assurance company except the late Judge Bompas, an old college friend of my father. Judge Bompas, who was a director of one office, interested himself in me in the kindest manner, and through his recommendation I was offered a humble position in the life department of the Alliance Assurance Company. Mr. Robert Lewis, who for fifty years was the chief officer of that famous company, offered me the job during the Easter holidays of 1891. I accepted, and at once telegraphed resigning my post at the Oxford Military College. With the Alliance, and subsequently with the Commercial Union Assurance Company, I spent about four years as an actuarial clerk. This practical training, short though it was, has been of inestimable service to me. It gave me an interest in all branches of insurance which remains to this day, and my training in the work of an insurance office made of me that rather rare phenomenon, a financial journalist and writer who had himself seen the daily round of a great business machine. My friend and oldest colleague, Hartley Withers, drew from

his early years at the Stock Exchange an experience as invaluable as mine drawn from insurance.

As soon as I had settled down in London as an insurance clerk—whereby I earned £150 a year, lived upon it, and paid off some outstanding Cambridge bills—I began ‘to write for the Press’ on general subjects. This, for a while, meant writing for the waste-paper basket. Then I suddenly discovered that a free lance journalist—at least in those days—who understood something about finance, insurance and accounting, and could write lucidly on his own technical subjects, was sure of a welcome whenever he showed his copy. Of course the occasion had to be one of news interest, but given the occasion the specialist who could write in popular convincing fashion was actually in demand. I made this discovery when the Liberator Building Society blew up and deposited J. Spencer Balfour, Esq., M.P. (a rising Liberal politician) in the mud as plain ‘Jabez.’ From the mud, by way of the Argentine Republic, Jabez was plucked and cast into prison. Jabez Balfour was one of the best friends I ever had, though he never knew it. Even in those early days I had an unfailing eye for a balance sheet. I analysed those of the Liberator and allied companies and wrote a dozen or more articles upon them. The evening papers—the *Globe*, *Pall Mall* and *St. James’s*—grabbed at them and held out their hands for more. I shall never forget the triumph—I have never had a triumph since to compare with it—of one luncheon interval when I got the *St.*

James's (then edited by Sidney Low) and read in an A. B. C. shop the leader headed 'The Value of Assets.' It was mine, mine every word, and I was a mere beginner and an outsider. I had sent in an article explaining how a company might show beautiful figures of assets in its balance sheet and yet have nothing behind them worth a twopenny damn. It was quite a good article and Mr. Low had made a leader of it. After that frontal assault on the leader column of *The St. James's Gazette* I had no further apprehensions about failing to seize that editorial chair of my ambitions. It was still some years' distant, yet distinctly visible in the offing. At this time I was an actuarial clerk, and had never seen the inside of a newspaper office.

I entered the service of *The Times* in April 1895, and there I remained—with a brief interval as a specialist outside contributor—until my appointment in the summer of 1909 as editor of *The Glasgow Herald*. I was then Assistant Manager of *The Times*. The whole of my editorial life in daily journalism has been passed in the offices of these two newspapers, one of the first rank in England and the other of the first rank in Scotland. Thanks to my most fortunate training in finance and business, I was always in the strong position of being able to earn a comfortable income outside as a specialist contributor, and never was compelled to fight my way through the vastly overcrowded ranks of journalism. If I could not *get on* inside a newspaper office I was always prepared to *get out*.

One day early in 1895 an inspiration came to me to write to Moberly Bell, the power behind the proprietors of *The Times*, and offer my services in the City office. It was one of the many happy inspirations which I have had and have always followed. I set out my 'experience' as a contributor to several London papers on financial subjects. In course of post I received a form of application. The preparation and despatch of these forms of application gave Moberly Bell vast pleasure. He loved to be thought business-like, though really he was one of the least business-like of men with whom I have ever worked. I filled in the form as well as I could and sent it off, expecting to hear nothing further. I was an unknown outsider, and my offer of service had been made under a mere impulse. But by return of post came a letter for me in Moberly Bell's own handwriting. It was his habit to spend many hours of every day in writing long letters in his own hand—to anybody who excited his interest. He was a most admirable letter writer—and one of the finest newspaper controversialists who ever lived—but if he would have dictated his letters to clerks instead of writing them with his own hand, he might not have worn himself out at a comparatively early age. But to his dying day in *The Times* office itself he continued this laborious manner of correspondence, and it was while writing one of these letters that he fell dead from his chair.

Moberly Bell was unusually brief in this first letter out of many hundreds which I received from him. He

asked me to call as soon as possible at *The Times* office. I went, and there met the man who counted for more than anyone else at Printing House Square. I shall have a great deal to say about him in this book. I came to know him very well indeed and to love him, though there were not many of my colleagues who shared my feelings. Perhaps most of them only knew him through those caustic letters of his refusing them advances in their salaries. I myself received several of them. Moberly Bell said, "I liked your application, and especially the modesty of your requirements. When can you come to our City office?" I was prepared, I replied, to begin at the shortest notice, for I had already given up my insurance job. He told me that he would write to me again and I went away with my head in the air. Thirty years ago *The Times* was the summit of earthly ambition in the eyes of aspirants in journalism. Two weeks passed and I heard nothing. Then I ventured to call at Printing House Square, and was shown up to Mr. Walter's room, in which sat the governing proprietor of *The Times* and Moberly Bell his 'assistant manager.' It soon appeared that Moberly Bell had forgotten all about me, and that Mr. Walter had never heard of me. It was an embarrassing interview. Moberly Bell said shortly, "I will speak to Hooper" (who had recently been appointed City editor), and so dismissed me. My head and tail were both depressed as I left. It then seemed that my rosy visions of *The Times* office—and of ultimate succession to its editorial chair—had been premature. But

Moberly Bell did speak to Wynnard Hooper who communicated with me. Hooper and I had one or two meetings, but as Bell had given no instructions concerning me they were rather inconclusive. I don't suppose Moberly Bell would have given any instructions concerning me if I had not resolved upon the very strange course of just going to the City office and taking up my quarters there. Hartley Withers, my first colleague and oldest friend, was in charge ; Hooper worked with Printing House Square as his headquarters. Withers was kindness itself, so was Frank Stone and a humorous youth named Briggs, yet not one of them had a ha'porth of an idea as to why I had come and what was to be done with me. Nevertheless, I carried on.

At the end of a week no arrangements had been made for paying me a salary. The cashier had never heard of me. There seemed to be a grave flaw in my campaign for taking possession of *The Times* City office. What happened then astonishes me even now. I was not really wanted, I had no definite duties, though my experience of insurance technique made me of some use, and Moberly Bell would have been content never to have seen or heard of me again. Nevertheless, when I wrote boldly to Bell, stating that I had joined and would he kindly give instructions that I should be paid four pounds a week—which was the modest salary that had excited Bell's original interest—the marvellous thing happened. Orders were given to pay me in due form, and there I was established, with my foot in

The Times office and receiving a weekly salary. I have laughed over all this many times with Moberly Bell. "You were so devilish persistent," he explained. And then with that winning smile of his—though he *did* look rather like a bald-headed eagle—he added, "I am jolly glad you were."

We were a happy family in that old City office of *The Times* nearly thirty years ago. When I recall the plethora of 'money' in those sumptuous days—the Bank rate was pegged at two per cent. for over two years, and bank bills were discounted at *one half per cent. per annum*—I almost wish that I had not survived until these years of penury. My most startling contribution to the financial columns of *The Times* arose out of this long pegged Bank rate. There was a second edition of *The Times* published about two o'clock in the afternoon. It contained scraps of financial news and an opening share list. One Thursday it was my job to send down to Printing House Square the items for this second edition. I had so often been to the Bank and seen the rate board marked 'No Change' that I had given up all idea of any change. The Bank rate always had in my time been two per cent., and I did not see why it should not remain two per cent. until my grandchildren came along. So I omitted to go to the Bank that morning. Of course that confounded Bank rate did change that day. So *The Times*, the great City authority, came out with 'No Change,' while all the evening papers had the 'Advance in Bank Rate' on their news bills. It was an awful miss, though

fortunately it did not matter much. Nobody at Printing House Square paid the smallest attention to what was, or was not, in the second edition—which, as far as I could discover, had no circulation worth bothering about—so that the failure of the City office (meaning me) to detect the absurd move up of the Bank rate passed wholly unnoticed. Nobody said a word to me about it—except, of course, the outraged Hooper—and I continued to draw my weekly salary.

Twenty-seven years later, in December 1922, the happy family which discharged its important duties in *The Times* City office in 1895, met at luncheon. We were all present: Hooper (who looked the youngest among us grey-haired veterans), Hartley Withers, Frank Stone, the once Boy Briggs, and Harcourt Kitchin. We are all alive still, perhaps because in those merry days of our youth none of us did too much work.

CHAPTER IV

PRINTING HOUSE SQUARE IN THE 'NINETIES

AFTER twelve months of the City office as fifth wheel of the coach, I left for Printing House Square. I learned the daily routine of City journalism, the value of a personal connection among financial authorities, and the methods of collecting stock exchange and money market information, and I clearly perceived the narrowness of the purely City range of news as then understood by the daily press. Of finance as the hand-maid of industry and of commerce, national and international, one saw little except through symbols like Bank rates and discount rates for fine paper. We paid small heed to commercial bills, and when we had given the chief points in the profit and loss account and balance sheet of a trading company our job was ended. Even in regard to the companies close at hand, the City office of that day did not often peer behind the figures and seek to understand the actual business which was done. It required no great acumen to perceive that there was a vast unoccupied field awaiting the little spade of a newspaper pioneer. Specialist papers existed, trade papers, which dealt with insurance and

shipping, and the numberless branches of industry and commerce, but for *The Times* and other daily journals those fields of human enterprise scarcely existed. We had market reports, prepared by an agency, and there we stopped. I proposed to myself, and afterwards partially carried through my intentions, to do for insurance and shipping and industry on a big scale what the City office did for pure finance. Years later I expressed in the form of an aphorism what I learned in 1895-6 in Bartholomew Lane: '*News* does not depend upon the occurrence of events but on the presence of reporters.' The truth of this is so obvious that it does not need to be underlined. News which is not reported simply runs to waste in so far as newspapers and their readers are concerned. Industrial finance and shipping, the big developments of commerce, the numberless fields of business energy, scarcely existed as material for news because there was no one to take a keen interest in them and to look after them. So I cast myself for the part. My way of advance was blocked at the City office. Hartley Withers, of the same age within a month, was in possession of the City end; Wynnard Hooper, my senior by several years though still in early middle life, was in possession of the Printing House Square end as adviser on finance to the editor. In so far as the range of the City office stretched, I was in a blind alley. So when Moberly Bell suggested one day that I should have a run at Printing House Square in the sub-editorial departments I joyfully accepted the offer. Before I

could become a specialist contributor in my own subjects—an 'authority' as I put it, Heaven be merciful to me !—it was clearly essential that the great ones of Printing House Square should become aware of my existence and become convinced of my ability to deliver goods of an acceptable standard. Mr. Kipling had begun to write of 'Little Tin Gods,' but in my eyes then the gods of Printing House Square were of pure refined gold. To this day, though I approach Buckle boldly, address him familiarly, and have played golf with him, he still towers as the man who was Editor of *The Times* when I first thrust myself in as a humble beginner. I feel towards him much as a curate, who has later become himself a minor bishop, must feel towards that unique bishop who ordained him to the priesthood. The gap between the chief and the subordinate, between schoolmaster and boy, never quite closes up in subsequent years. After he became eminent my old pupil, Sir Eric Geddes, once lunched with me as my guest. I could perceive in his slightly apprehensive eye a sub-conscious fear lest, as in old days at the Oxford Military College, I should impatiently smack his smooth round skull.

Moberly Bell's offer arose out of a difference of opinion between us in the matter of my pay. I had suggested that if I was worth four pounds a week at the beginning of a year I ought to be worth five pounds a week at the end of it. Moberly Bell smiled rather nastily. "Not as fifth wheel of the coach at the City office," said he, indelicately. I hastened to

divert his attention from the instability of my status. I reminded him that at *The Times* were many mansions, and assured him of my capacity to fill any of them.

"I will give you five pounds a week in Number Seven," replied Bell, and added, "You will find a year or two there worth while." Number Seven, a cavernous back room with a smell of sour meat, was then the department of home sub-editors. It was ill-ventilated and cheerless, and was afterwards, and most appropriately, allotted to visitors who desired to see the editor. The atmosphere and gloom of Number Seven quickly reduced editorial visitors from roaring lions to the most humble obedient servants.

After a moment of reflection I accepted Number Seven and the five pounds a week. And so I withdrew my foot from the City office and planted it firmly in Printing House Square.

The salary offered may seem small in the eyes of young fellows who have had no experience of the spacious days of the middle 'nineties. Multiply it by two, make a further addition for taxation, and you will get something over twelve guineas a week as a post-war equivalent. And also it should be borne in mind that neither in the City office nor in Printing House Square was my official salary the measure of my income. My outside and inside connections grew—my contributions to *The Times* on my special subjects were paid for at three pounds a column—and my income then, and for some years afterwards, was never less than seven or eight pounds a week, the equivalent in

purchasing power of sixteen to eighteen pounds a week now. I lived in a flat facing the west side of Battersea Park. There in 1896 my eldest son was born. We had plenty of money for trips on Saturdays and for a month's holiday in the summer or autumn. I may not have saved much, nevertheless—on the principle as an 'insurance expert' of drinking my own medicine—I took out an endowment assurance policy and have gone on taking out other policies periodically ever since. If I could have my youth over again it would, by my choice, be lived in the sumptuous 'nineties and not in these melancholy after-war 'twenties.

My early experiences as a sub-editor introduced me to that remarkable mortuary of news which was called the 'Outer Sheet.' The printing plant of *The Times*—owned by the Walters under their perpetual printing contract—was not of high efficiency. The machines were unable to print and fold at one operation more than quite a limited number of pages, so that as *The Times* grew bigger and bigger it was usually printed in two distinct parts—the Inner and the Outer Sheets. The inner sheet contained the leaders and what was held to be the latest and most important news. The outer sheet was a sort of journalistic dustbin into which 'held over matter' was shovelled anyhow. A great many of the special contributions which found their way, after long delays, into the outer sheet would have been excellent copy had they been used when they were written. But several days, sometimes several weeks, exhaust the keeping qualities of the best of

topical articles. As Lord Northcliffe drily remarked long afterwards, "*The Times* thinks that news like wine improves by keeping."

In the home sub-editors' room we worked in a series of shifts. I have forgotten the precise hour when the paper went to press. It was about 3.30 a.m. In the editorial rooms hung a printed notice which I can see before me now. It ran: "Gentlemen are requested not to write after 2.15 a.m. Every line of copy sent to the printer after that hour imperils the publication of the paper." Think of that, my younger brothers of the Press, you who get rid of your first editions and go comfortably home by midnight. One of the sub-editors would come in at five o'clock, a second would follow at six o'clock; the main body would come into action at eight or nine. Except for the two sub-editors on the early turns no one got away until after three o'clock in the morning. There was a famous train which left Ludgate Hill for the Dulwich area at 3.15. Many of us went by it year in year out.

In my earliest days I was permitted to take the second turn, beginning at six o'clock, and my first duty on arrival at Printing House Square was to go through the proofs of 'held over matter' appertaining to Number Seven. They would consist of reports, paragraphs of 'news' and miscellaneous material which had not succeeded in getting into the paper for which they had been prepared. Now all this matter, dull though it might be after having been reported and sub-edited in the old fashion, had once been 'news.' It was news

no longer ; its little day had passed. Its proper place was the waste-paper basket. Yet no one in authority ever seemed to grasp this simple truth which is of the essence of daily journalism. What we were instructed to do—I often did it myself when on an early turn—was to take this mass of old proofs and stale copy and to ‘bring it up to date for the Outer Sheet.’ I repeat the exact words which were employed to describe the operation. Bringing this worm-eaten rubbish up-to-date meant changing ‘yesterday’ into the day of the week, and writing, wherever made necessary by effluxion of time, ‘last week’ in the place of ‘this week.’ Then we marked all this ageing and aged ‘news’ for the outer sheet of the next day’s issue ; some of it got in then, some of it did not. Every line that got in took up the space of real fresh news, and that which did not get in came up again to be ‘brought up to date’ once more.

The result, the inevitable result, was that the Outer Sheet of each morning’s issue of *The Times* was a receptacle for stale ‘news’ which ought to have been ruthlessly scrapped. Every day the held-over matter blocked the road which should have been cleared for fresh matter. The more old stuff we succeeded in shoving away into the outer sheet the more of the next day’s news failed to get in, became held-over matter, and suffered the degradation of being ‘brought up to date’ in its turn. Everything that went into the outer sheet was soiled by contact with the detritus of the sub-editors’ room. That outer sheet was more

than a mortuary ; it was a morgue. For at least the contents of a mortuary are secluded from the ribald public eye, while the rotting corpses of our morgue were daily displayed before a derisive Fleet Street.

But perhaps I ought not to complain. The system, or want of system, suited me very well. I have secured publication—and payment at £3 a column—for many a special article of mine by getting it marked for the outer sheet. Once safely there upon an obscure page my articles had a good chance of remaining in when the outer sheet went to press, while had they been put down for the inner sheet the eagle eye of the editor, or of J. B. Capper the senior Assistant Editor, would have leaped to their intrusion with lamentable consequences to my pride and pocket. Once, when as Assistant Manager I was going through proofs of long standing matter which was congesting the caseroom, I chanced upon an article of my own which had been lying in type for more than six years. After that lapse of time even I had not the courage ‘to bring it up to date.’

The daily congestion from which *The Times* suffered—in home and foreign news, in special articles, book reviews, letters, everything—had a common cause. It was hopelessly overset every day. There was no departmental planning out of the paper every afternoon so that the news of all kinds could be apportioned to the space available. Printing House Square was divided into water-tight compartments. The Editor’s Room poured out articles and letters ; the home

sub-editors' room poured out what it conceived to be home news; masses of copy flowed in from the law and parliamentary reporters and the City office; the foreign news sub-editors contributed their whack, and alone had the distinction of trying to fit their telegrams to the daily page or so which was their normal allowance. But all the rest of us overwhelmed the printers with copy, subject only to the general check of tightness of space. The consequence was that masses of news and articles sent out every night came up next evening as held-over matter. Now and then there would be a kind of gaol delivery, old proofs would be brought up, condemned and deleted. But it was done on no system. It was merely a spasmodic effort to break loose from the trammels of the lack of system.

If I were asked to set forth in a sentence the basic causes of the failure of the old *Times* to maintain itself against modern newspaper competition, I should respond in very few words. The causes were : first, the vicious constitution with its two sets of proprietors and its independent printing business ; and, secondly, the almost complete isolation in the 'nineties of Printing House Square from the developments which had been taking place in Fleet Street during the last thirty years of the nineteenth century. I would not have it thought that I seek to throw the responsibility for the failure upon three men : Mr. Walter, the Governing Proprietor of the newspaper as a newspaper ; Moberly Bell, in fact though not in title, the Manager of the newspaper ; and G. E. Buckle the Editor. I regard

all three of them as the unhappy victims of the constitution, and of the isolation which cut them off from all experience of, and with, other newspapers.

I do not know how the aloofness of *The Times* from Fleet Street came about. It was conspicuous in all things when I went to Printing House Square in 1896, but it had most certainly not been characteristic of Printing House Square during the great days of *The Times*. Then, the third John Walter was far in advance of his times in mechanical enterprise and in the encouragement of inventors of new type-setting and printing plants. Delane, whatever we may now think of his ways, was a born journalist, who watched his competitors as a master swordsman might watch an active opponent in front of his point. There was in those days no lack of the vigilance which alone can keep newspapers, however old and honoured, alive and hearty. *The Times* of the 'fifties and 'sixties distanced its competitors in circulation, in reputation, and in profit-earning capacity, because it was superior to its competitors at all points of the great game. *The Times* of my early days had lost almost everything except a high sense of superiority, which by itself was a most paralysing inheritance.

If Mr. Walter, Moberly Bell, and Buckle had been granted in their early years the good fortune of being compelled to fight their own way in the rough and tumble of journalism, there might never have been that decline and fall of *The Times* which ended with the sale to Lord Northcliffe in 1908.

I do not suppose that any one of the three authorities, in whose hands rested the fortunes of *The Times*, ever clearly analysed his feelings towards it. They were alike in cherishing the deepest respect for *The Times* as the greatest newspaper in the world, and in being single hearted in their devotion to its service. *The Times*, in its claim upon their love and worship, ranked second only to their Sovereign and country. Indeed, I fancy, in their hearts love of *The Times* and love of country were the same sentiment. *The Times* was England. So it came about that *The Times* grew with them to be a thing apart from Fleet Street, a thing held to be above and beyond the laws of mortality which remorselessly work their will in Fleet Street. I do not think any one of them quite grasped until early in the new century why *The Times*, conducted as they believed it ought to be conducted, failed to appeal to the younger generation of the educated classes—to my own generation. *The Times* was in the fatal position of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*; everyone agreed that it was a world's masterpiece which should be taken as read.

I shall have to deal in my next chapter with the splendid traditions of *The Times*, its impartiality in the selection and presentation of news and its untiring pursuit of accuracy of fact; for the while I am concerned with the disastrous tradition which had, perhaps, been derived from a misapprehension of Delane's success. Delane was successful because he appealed to the prevailing tastes of the cultivated readers of his

times. He did not succeed because he happened to concentrate most of his attention upon home and foreign politics. He concentrated upon these subjects because his readers wanted any amount of them and wanted them hot and strong. *The Times* of Delane was never what we now call a 'popular' newspaper. It had not a twentieth part of the circulation of the present day *Daily Mail*. But the public for whom Delane catered wanted certain things, and Delane made it his business to supply them. It was the misfortune of the comparatively modern *Times* of the 'nineties that the tastes of the educated public had changed a good deal since the days of Delane, and that *The Times* had not changed with them.

There was not a single man in authority in *The Times* office who had any real experience of newspaper methods other than those of *The Times* itself. Mr. Walter, when I first set foot in Printing House Square, had recently succeeded his father the third John Walter. I had never met the third John Walter, but from what I heard of him I should judge that he was not a man to pay much attention to the ways of other newspapers. He is reported to have declared once that he was "not aware of the existence of *The Daily Telegraph*." The third John Walter was receptive of ideas in his youth but I fancy that he reigned too long—nearly fifty years. Mr. Arthur Walter's mind was not like this, in its perfect detachment, but he did not know, and scarcely could know, much of what went on on the other side of Ludgate Circus. Moberly Bell, after twenty-one

years of life in Egypt where he had been Correspondent of *The Times*, was brought home in 1890 to be assistant manager to Mr. Walter. He knew as little of other newspapers as did his titular chief. Buckle was appointed editor in the early 'eighties when a young man of great promise from Oxford. He had had no opportunity of seeing how things were done in other newspaper offices. I do not suppose that any of these men ever suspected until too late how out of date *The Times* had become. No men, no matter what their natural ability and aptitude for a job, can compete in the open market with their wares unless they have all the assistance which modern plant and processes can give them. In the newspaper fight against Fleet Street *The Times* was like an army which put up Tower muskets against machine guns. Right down to the sale of the paper in 1908 there was not a Linotype or a Monotype type-casting machine in the whole office. The paper was set by the old obsolete Kastenbein, which took two men and a boy to do the work of one man with the linotype, and then left over the distribution of type to be done by other machines and men. And the printing plant was so defective that the paper usually had to be produced in two parts, the notorious inner and outer sheets. This mechanical handicap was the direct result of that division in ownership and control which tied *The Times* as a newspaper in the perpetual bonds of a printing contract held by the Walters. Though Moberly Bell managed *The Times* subject to the control of the governing

proprietor, it was Godfrey Walter who controlled the printing office. And Godfrey Walter himself was very much in the hands of his technical advisers, who could always assure him that suggested reforms were 'impossible.'

Perhaps the best way of illustrating the deficiency of *The Times* in editorial and mechanical technique will be to take an example which every newspaper reader will readily apprehend. In the days of Delane there was no such thing as a technique of display and make-up of news. Readers then would appear to have spent their entire waking day quarrying in the columns of *The Times* for the news which had therein been buried overnight. The news was not presented to them ; only by the exercise of patience and long suffering were they permitted to enjoy it. One day at Printing House Square I turned up a file for the Crimean War just to see for myself how the great Delane edited *The Times* of his day. It was difficult to believe that anybody had edited it at all. I took an issue which contained one of those Russell letters which fired England from end to end. England must have been extraordinarily combustible. For that letter was printed in four solid columns of small type without a relieving crosshead. It was headed, I think, 'Letter from the Crimea' and dated ; that was all. There was nothing to call the attention of readers to the momentous contents of that letter, and I am sure that *The Times* then never condescended to display a newsbill in the streets. After studying with respectful

wonder the presentation by Delane of his star feature, Russell's letter, I turned to the parliamentary report. Seventeen columns of solid minion. There was a heading, 'Proceedings in Parliament' or something snappy like that, but no further line of description. Walls and walls of solid type without a crosshead to cheer the reader upon his weary way. If a speaker got a paragraph all to himself he was a proud man.

The purpose of this digression is to illustrate the extent of the progress in the technique of presentation and make-up between the days of Delane and the 'nineties of the last century. The first issue of the *Daily Mail* of 1896 in its display and arrangement is not unlike the *Daily Mail* of yesterday. Even *The Times* had learned something of display. Very properly it exercised great restraint. For if one gets into the habit of shouting every day there is no shout left loud enough for the death of a king or the outbreak of a war. I make no complaint of lack of adequacy in the headlines and crossheads of *The Times* of the 'nineties. This part of the technical lesson had been learned. But the vastly important lesson of the make-up of news had not been learned at all. Fleet Street knew all about it, but *The Times*, which ignored Fleet Street, did not know.

There was an immense quantity of good stuff, dull perhaps, yet really good stuff, in the old *Times*. There was now and then brilliant stuff. But it was made as difficult as possible to find. No regular feature, except

the leading articles and the foreign news, was placed upon the same page each day. On Monday, say, the City article would be at the beginning ; on a Tuesday, say, it would be at the end. The parliamentary report of a short sitting would be in the outer sheet ; the report of a long sitting would be somewhere in the inner sheet. And so on, all the way through the paper. No regular reader, opening the old *Times* and looking for the news in which he was principally interested, could ever make sure of finding it at once. Complaints poured in verbally and by letter. Almost everyone whom I met in the City spoke to me about it. The stock reply was that *The Times* supplied an index which could always be consulted by those who sought to thread their way through the mazes of its columns. But the British newspaper reader has no use for an index. He likes to seize upon his familiar journal and turn at once to his own cherished page. And if a newspaper, even *The Times*, persists in refusing to give him the arrangement that he wants, a day will dawn when he, exasperated, will go to some other newspaper which does. I say, in all seriousness, that no single circumstance more surely drove once faithful readers away from the old *Times* and repelled the younger generation of new readers, than the almost complete disregard for a regular make-up. Readers may have been spoiled by the deft ways in which their custom had been catered for elsewhere ; the intricacies of *The Times* bothered them, and they preferred to give up *The Times* rather than put up with the bother.

The Times was never editorially made-up in the days of which I write, nor in the days of other reforms of which I shall write later. The Editor and Moberly Bell were told by the Walter printing department that it could not be done. They possessed neither the technical knowledge nor the power to overrule the printing department. So it came about that *The Times* was flung together by the foreman of the caseroom, and he got away the slabs of metal as it suited his mechanical convenience. *The Times*, in newspaper language, was made-up with a shovel. We were always told that what was practicable with other papers was impracticable with *The Times*. The fault lay not with the Editor or Moberly Bell; they accepted as final what was told them by the technical staff of the printing department.

CHAPTER V

IMPERISHABLE TRADITIONS

THE old Editor's Room of *The Times*, whatever may have been its faults of detachment from the world outside, enshrined the splendid traditions of impartiality in news and of accuracy of substance which had made *The Times* in the days of its prosperity and which sustained *The Times* all through the years of its decline. One observes now every day, with respectful gratitude, how those noble traditions of impartiality and of accuracy—without which a newspaper press is of less moral worth to the world than honest soap boiling—are being revived and fanned into vigorous life again in the new *Times* of 1923.

The high priest of the religion of accuracy in detail was J. B. Capper, a shrewd, wiry, red-haired Midland Englishman from Edinburgh University, who walked into *The Times* office without appointment in 1878—much as I did myself in the 'nineties—and remained as the chief Assistant Editor for nearly thirty years. Capper in the course of his eight years' residence in Edinburgh must have been duly initiated into the blood brotherhood of Scotland and armed with a pair of those

wire cutters which, manufactured in some secret northern factory, chop barbed English barriers like so much cobweb. Capper arrived, saw and conquered. He served for six years in the Gallery of the Commons and in Number Seven, and then . . . "*J'y suis*," he must have murmured as he first sat himself down in the assistant editor's chair in 1884, "*J'y suis, J'y reste*." For there he 'rested' until his retirement a year before the war.

Capper's wiriness and capacity for work were inexhaustible. For a quarter of a century and more he never got to his bed on a working day till four o'clock in the morning after. Yet he was always alert, and I never remember him to have been ill. Until the great change of 1908 I am sure that Capper enjoyed what would have been to most men—certainly to me—a job of unspeakable dreariness. For, except during the bright weeks of relaxation when he was acting editor, Capper spent the long nights critically reading proofs. Upon him rested much of the responsibility for achieving that accuracy in detail which was the glory of *The Times*. I can fairly claim that the sub-editors did their utmost to support him. From the cavern of Number Seven, depressing though it was upon our health and spirits, we never permitted a line of copy to escape into the printer's tray until every fact had been verified which could be verified. We called into our service every kind of book of reference. We watched like court chamberlains for every misdescription by a careless reporter of a titled personage. We consulted maps

for all place names. We looked up encyclopaedias for technical descriptions. We 'vetted' the smallest of pars as closely as we revised the most important reports or correspondents' articles. The law and parliamentary reports did not pass through our hands, but all the rest of the home news did, from however exalted the source, and we stripped it clean of every mistake which we could detect. I remember one unhappy sub-editor—not a University man like some of us, but one who had risen from the ranks of journalism—who never could be trusted with a piece of social copy containing titles. Just as an Englishman can never explain to a Scotsman the usage of 'shall' and 'will'—many Scotsmen, thinking to be on the safe side, always speak or write 'will'—so we could never explain to this poor fellow the distinction to be drawn between Lady Montmorency, Lady Lavinia Montmorency, and Lavinia, Lady Montmorency. In those years, long before Lord Charles Beresford was created a peer, this sub-editor always wanted to write his name down as 'Lord Beresford.' We never succeeded in satisfying him that 'Lord Beresford' was not as correct as it was convenient in a narrow headline. Our colleague's masterpiece—achieved shortly before he ceased to be our colleague and blossomed to fruition in a field better suited to his talents—was the transformation of a short letter from the then Bishop of Stepney into a par. The paragraph, as it was printed in the paper—for, I rejoice to record that it eluded the superhuman vigilance of Capper (who, may be, was having

a night off)—the paragraph, setting forth a letter from the Bishop of Stepney, began "Mr. G. F. Stepney writes :— . . ."

From early in the evening until past three o'clock in the morning, with a decent interval for dinner, J. B. Capper sat at his desk critically reading proofs. His range was anything in the range of the whole paper (except advertisements) of which he was not relieved by the editor or the foreign editor. Any one can turn up a file of *The Times* in the 'nineties and reckon up for himself the prodigious nightly task which it was Capper's dreadful job to get through. He discharged his duties faithfully and alone for years and years, until a belated sense of humanity was stirred in the hearts of Buckle and Moberly Bell, and they called in Monypenny as a second assistant editor. It was no perfunctory reading which Capper had to put through. He read not only for mistakes in detail which the sub-editors might have let slip, but for those much more subtle lapses in discretion, in judgment, or in taste which, though they may pass unobserved in copy and even in proof, howl at an editor the next morning in the paper. Every man who has been an editor will understand the sort of thing that I mean. And it was a very very rare thing for a mistake of any kind to pass Capper's eye. From long practice and experience he had developed a nose for a blunder, as mysterious and as acute as that nose, of preternatural sensitiveness, which warns an underwriter at Lloyd's that there is something rocky about a risk offered to him. I have

seen a skilled underwriter take a slip from a broker, look at it, and instantly hand it back. "What's wrong?" the broker would inquire in bland surprise. "It's a good steamer, good owners, and a good voyage." "I don't like the smell of it," the underwriter would reply, and the broker, without another word of persuasion, would go away. Capper had a nose just like that. A paragraph might look all right, yet Capper did not somehow like the smell of it. An assistant editor, with the unsleeping eye of J. B. Capper, and the uncanny, inexplicable nose of J. B. Capper, was a jewel beyond price in the Editor's Room of a paper like *The Times*, which took an intense pride in the accuracy of its news. And Capper was much more than an exceptionally vigilant critic of proofs. He was a journalist. Had he chosen to desert *The Times* he could almost at any time during his years of prime have become an editor of distinction in London.

Leading articles, as the expressions of the opinions of the editor's room, shared in the sanctity which was inherent in that room. They might not always be very well written; sometimes they were very badly written. They might not always be very well informed—as, for example, when one of the official leader writers tackled a subject of which he knew nothing, and did not call for assistance from some obscure person who did. Nevertheless they were, if not verbally inspired by Olympus, regarded as no ordinary human productions. When I look back, and recall the flounderings more than once of an official leader writer

when he plunged into waters in which I could swim with some confidence, I am at a loss to understand why leader writers ranked so much more exaltedly in the editorial hierarchy than the contributors of special articles. Though *The Times* was exceedingly badly organised in many important respects, it was in other respects well and carefully edited. Buckle was not a newspaper organiser, but he was a scholar, a man of wide and sound knowledge and an excellent judge of quality in newspaper articles. He was also in daily touch through the 'Letters to the Editor' with the first authorities in England upon any conceivable subject. A specialist writer, who tripped up through lack of knowledge of the subject upon which he had ventured to write an article for *The Times*, was sure to get hard knocks when the editor read his letters of a day or two after the article had been published. The writer of a special contribution who turned out 'tripe,' and got it printed, did not get many more guineas per column out of *The Times*. Buckle was not a man to be taken in by special articles which pretended to a quality which they did not in fact possess. He was offered and rejected masses of them. The general standard of special articles in *The Times* was high ; they were as well written and quite as well informed as the best of the leaders. The common run of them was distinctly better than the worst of the leaders. Yet a special writer, who happened to be a member of *The Times* staff, had no rank at all beside that of a regular leader writer.

Let me draw a little picture of a leader writer at work upon a subject with which he had no acquaintance whatever. It happened that in the second or third year of my sojourn in Printing House Square I was working in the foreign sub-editor's room while a race for the America Cup was proceeding off Sandy Hook. The telegrams, as they dribbled in, were handed to me because my Devon upbringing and my taste for salt water had made me familiar with yacht sailing. Accuracy in detail was pursued even more closely, if that were possible, in the foreign news than in the home news. I had pieced the telegrams together, sorted out the blunders, and made a connected story of the racing, when Capper—who was just then acting editor—sent for me to the editor's room. Capper also had a taste for the sea. I took my story to him and explained what had happened. The English yacht had not won, but there had for once been a race. Capper judged that a short leading article expressing encouragement was called for. Now any newspaper editor, conducting a paper other than *The Times*, would have said to me—the one man in the office who had handled the telegrams from American waters and who understood the technique of the subject—"Get out the story to the printers and then do me a short leader." This course would have saved time in the caseroom, and would not, I venture to believe, have gravely disfigured the leading columns. But no. Though Capper was a true journalist, he had been for a dozen years in the editor's room, and could not bend his mind to the

revolutionary conception of employing to write a leader one who, whatever might be his qualifications, was not a 'leader writer.' What he did say was : " Please take the telegrams to ———, explain the whole business to him, and ask him from me to write a short leader." So off I went and embarked this official leader writer as best I could upon the perilous voyage of describing in print the intricacies of a yacht race to readers, many of whom would certainly be skilled yachtsmen. The humour of the business appealed to me even then, though I never for one instant had hoped or expected that Capper would entrust the leader to me. I, though known as a special writer on commercial subjects, was officially a sub-editor, and for a sub-editor to write a leader was unheard of.

The result which emerged from this remarkable—though exactly characteristic—procedure at Printing House Square was not what might have been expected. The official leader on the America Cup suffered what may be appropriately called a sea change before it was allowed to go forward to the printers. At about one o'clock in the morning Capper sent for me again. He was miserably turning over the typewritten sheets of the article. It appalled him because, as I have mentioned, he knew something of the sea. I cannot remember his exact words ; the substance of them was : " For God's sake, Kitchin, do take this slush and make a leader of it." So I took the slush, made a leader of it, re-submitted the draft to Capper, and so it was sent out. There was about four-fifths Kitchin and one-fifth

— to that leader. But the honour of the editor's room and its appendages had been saved. A regular hand had written the leading article ; Kitchin, a sub-editor, had merely sub-edited it. I have, since that first essay, often ' helped ' leader writers to compose their articles, but never once in all my years at Printing House Square have I been permitted to write a leader all by myself except in the ' Financial and Commercial Supplement,' which subsequently I started and edited. I could write as many special articles as I chose—and I did choose—but not leaders in the main body of *The Times*.

The outstanding service of George Earle Buckle to *The Times*, to his profession as a journalist, and to his fellow countrymen, was his resolute guardianship of the great *Times* tradition of impartiality in the news columns of the paper. I have already dwelt upon his and Capper's unsleeping regard for accuracy. The leading articles which expressed the opinions of Printing House Square were one thing ; the articles and telegrams, and reports and paragraphs, which gave the news of the day, at home and abroad, were another thing, wholly separate and distinct. There was no collusion whatsoever between the editorial opinions and the news column of the *Times*. The opinions of the Editor's Room were never in my time permitted to colour or to influence, by omission or selection, the presentation of news as it was seen and understood by those correspondents, whoever they might be and wherever they might be, whose duty it was to report upon it

and elucidate it for publication. This vital distinction in honest journalism between opinions and news was guarded by Buckle as he might have guarded a sacred flame upon the altar of his religion. It was his professional religion, and it was the professional religion of us all, whether we worked inside or outside *The Times*, in the 'nineties and in the early years of the twentieth century. Had Buckle done nothing more than this during his editorship of nearly thirty years he would have deserved well of the newspaper which he loved and of the country which he loved. An editor, more especially in the days when newspapers are so widely read and readers so inevitably ignorant, who permits his paper to become a vehicle of cooked 'news,' a factory of that organised lying known infamously as 'propaganda,' should be condemned to the ancient fate of a traitor.

It is no light thing, and no easy thing, to hold aloft in the news columns of a great paper the sacred lamp of Truth. No matter how high minded an editor may be, no matter how intellectually honest he may be, he is under the continual pressure of temptation to permit that lamp of Truth to burn with a smoky flame. When public feeling runs high in a national controversy it may seem even to him a national duty to indulge in 'news propaganda' rather than in real news. Without deliberately, or even consciously, 'cooking' the news columns, an editor may falsify the presentation of news by distorting its true proportions, by giving—for example—a greater prominence to information which

favours the side which he editorially supports, than to information which assists the side which he hopes will lose. But, whatever may have been the conscious or unconscious pressure brought to bear upon Buckle's mind, he never yielded to it; for him the subtle poisonous temptation of the 'stunt' or 'news propaganda' did not exist. The news columns of the old *Times* may have been cruelly dull and thrown together with a shovel, but they always glowed with the inestimable radiance of honest and accurate presentation.

A foreign correspondent, an 'own' or a 'special,' put forward the facts as he saw them, and drew the conclusions which commended themselves to his experience. He would frequently in his despatches suggest a line of criticism; his messages would be published, but when he came to read the articles in which the editor had expressed the views of Printing House Square he must very often have felt furious exasperation. For the Editor, *ex cathedrâ*, would speak with one voice, while 'our own correspondent' of Paris, or Berlin, or Rome, or Constantinople, would be left to speak with another and different voice. But that very divergence of view between Printing House Square and its authorised correspondents was the glory of the old *Times* and of the utmost service to the English public. The correspondents, no matter how eminent they might be, could not lead the Editor by the nose, and he in his turn would not attempt to influence, by omission or suggestion, the facts and

views expressed by them. The man on the spot had a free run in the news columns; the Editor and his skilled advisers judged the situation by the light of all the information which they possessed, and in relation to their own line of general policy. They reserved to themselves just as free a run in the leading columns as they accorded to their correspondents in the news columns.

It was the same with home politics, with financial and commercial questions, with industrial disputes, with all matters of current controversy. The leaders of the two great political parties in Parliament, and in their campaigns in the country, were reported with the strictest impartiality. Political news recognised no politics. If, say, a by-election were in progress, the correspondent sent to look after it wrote upon the situation as he saw it himself as an impartial observer. It was no business of his to influence the electoral result; it was his job to ascertain and present the facts and to draw such conclusions as seemed to him to be sound. The Editor, in his leading columns, might openly back Mr. A, but if the correspondent thought that Mr. B would win he did not hesitate to say so. It was the same with industrial disputes. *The Times* in its leading columns might support the employers in one dispute and sympathise with the workmen in another dispute; that was for the Editor to decide. The correspondent might, as a daily duty, have read the leading articles, yet he did not allow them to influence his judgment. He examined both sides of

the case for himself upon the scene of conflict, and presented the good points and the bad points of both sides. Of course, he did—more especially if he were a Dr. Shadwell—strongly influence the editorial view, but he did it legitimately by the power of his personality and by the extent to which the Editor valued his critical independence. Consider, in these days of 'propaganda' journalism—for once an ugly thing has appropriately taken a name as ugly as itself—what it meant to the influential public, which in the 'nineties and the early years of this century still read *The Times* in spite of its defects of organisation and equipment, to be sure of getting an impartially accurate presentation of all sides in national and international controversies! So long as Buckle was the editor, and so long as *The Times* was *The Times* of old traditions, readers could rest surely confident that the news columns would not be distorted or coloured in any manner whatsoever by the editorial opinions of Printing House Square.

Later I shall give a striking example of Buckle's editorial impartiality in the presentation of news and news articles at the time when I was editor of 'The Financial and Commercial Supplement,' and Mr. Joseph Chamberlain was conducting his raging tearing campaign for tariff reform. The Editor of *The Times* in his leading columns supported Mr. Chamberlain; it was my allotted task to give, with the strictest impartiality, a picture from week to week of the trade and commerce of the country. Again and again my serenely cold articles, and those of my team of

correspondents, made nonsense of Mr. Chamberlain's arguments and of the arguments in support of him written under instructions from the editor's room. But never once in those years of intense fiscal controversy did Buckle ever suggest that I should temper those cold blasts of weekly fact, for which I was responsible, to the shorn carcass of tariff reform. On the contrary, whenever I produced a particularly good issue, in variety and quality, Buckle would send me a charming little note of congratulation.

George Earle Buckle was no organiser, but he was a scholar, a man of high character, and his mind was as big as his great powerful body. Many of the qualities essential to a first-class editor of a first-class journal were his. In rapidity of perception he was beyond any journalist whom I have met. He would take a mass of manuscript or a blue book, flutter the pages, and within half a minute put his finger unerringly on the two or three points which counted. All of us who have handled copy in volume for half of our lives can rapidly perceive and tear out some of the grains of wheat hidden in the bushel of verbiage ; it was Buckle's sureness combined with his lightning quickness which beat any editor I have known. Then, though not an originator of ideas, and slow to be convinced of the necessity for change, once a change had been made which yielded good results in newspaper copy he instantly recognised its worth. Nevertheless, it was difficult in his reign for changes to be made except by those with whom he was in intimate daily association.

Those of his staff who grumbled at his aloofness, his inaccessibility, never got near enough to him to perceive how shy and retiring a man this great bluff Viking of an editor really was. He did not invite approach, but once he had given his confidence it was given absolutely.

The 'Letters to the Editor,' in which Buckle took a great personal interest, and which his secretaries got ready for his eye, were in the 'nineties a unique feature in daily journalism. They still are. They are the most valuable 'free copy' in the world. Whenever anything happens anywhere, or any topic of interest is being discussed, the most distinguished authorities in the land will 'write to *The Times* about it.' And the Editor encouraged them with all his might to go on writing to *The Times* about it. No efforts of other papers, even in the worst days of the old *Times*, ever succeeded in wresting away its letters as they did its advertisements. Perhaps if the advertisements had been as carefully watched over as the letters were, they, too, would not have been lost. Important letters were inserted promptly, and letters not suitable were politely returned to the writers by the secretaries. If it were desired to reduce the length of a letter, the writer was invited to cut it himself. And the writers, feeling flattered by such courteous attention by the mighty *Times*, tried all they knew to win the favour of the editor for their letters.

Amusing correspondence would arise sometimes out of those Letters to the Editor. One of the most

regular and most valuable of the letter writers of the days when I occasionally served as the editor's secretary was old Lord Grimthorpe. We used to underline for the Editor the star letters and articles in our lists, so that, if much pressed for time, he could deal with these important ones first. We always underlined Lord Grimthorpe. A controversy was raging about the most convenient side of a pavement on which to walk ; it is a subject which never grows old. Lord Grimthorpe had sent in a letter—at a moment when I was acting as the editor's secretary—upon this subject and had signed it "An Old Street Walker." I ventured, when I took the Editor his letters at five o'clock, to call his special attention to this remarkable signature. Buckle roared, and when Buckle laughed there was no doubt about it ; Printing House Square trembled to its foundations. [At the Richmond Golf Club, of which Buckle and I are fellow members, men sitting in the smoking room before lunch will hear an immense roar boom in through the windows from the seventeenth green, a couple of hundred yards away. " Ah ! " they say, " Buckle has holed his putt . . . "] I was instructed to write and suggest that Lord Grimthorpe should alter his equivocal signature. I did my most tactful best, yet the old man took it badly. He replied that " An Old Street Walker " exactly described what he was ; he was old and he was a street walker. If certain notorious persons were also described as old street walkers, that was no concern of his and should not, in his judgment, have been the concern of *The*

Times. He left the choice of a signature to me, and I, true to my training in Number Seven, put in something dull and safe. London would have been a brighter place if the original signature had appeared.

What I most enjoyed at Printing House Square in the 'nineties was an occasion to act as deputy to Wynnard Hooper, the financial assistant editor and adviser to the editor on all matters of high finance. For then I was an 'expert,' a person of much consequence and weight. When the experts of Printing House Square spoke upon matters within their competence lesser folk like editors, and even assistant editors, instantly accepted their judicial rulings in the humble spirit of the Junior Bar. As deputy to Wynnard Hooper in the 'nineties, I have declared the law and practice of high finance to Buckle himself, and escaped uninjured; though, when once long ago I tried to land a punch on a far greater expert, Hartley Withers, I had to take the count—knocked out in one round. There were several other experts, all men of much weight in the counsels of the editor's room, and all of them servants of that religion of Accuracy, of which J. B. Capper, with his unending proof sheets, was the high priest.

It seems to me as I look back down the years to the editor's room of the 'nineties that there were contained in it the visible elements of a tragedy. Here we had Buckle and Moberly Bell, both men hugely moulded in body and in mind, men of brains sufficient

and of intellectual capacity sufficient, combined with high character and devotion, to fit out half-a-dozen editor's rooms as important as that one behind the swing door in Printing House Square. Yet they were denied the fruit of their abilities and of their labours, because their Creator had denied to both of them those coarse common qualities which are granted to scores of thousands of common men who run businesses successfully because they possess them. Those two men had between them an abundance of the rarest and finest qualifications for their work. Their knowledge was wide, their interests were keen, their perceptions were rapid and accurate, their sense of public service infused all their public actions, and they were morally fearless. Neither of them would ever have willingly done what he regarded as derogatory to himself, or to the newspaper which to him was an essential part of England. Yet because they were not 'business men,' they stopped short of success. Buckle left the organisation and administration to Moberly Bell, and Moberly Bell, though he had been in business in Egypt for many years, knew scarcely more of organisation or of newspaper administration than did Buckle himself. It was a pitiful tragedy.

It really was a great place, the Printing House Square of the 'nineties. It was my first newspaper office. I admired it then and laughed at it a little—especially at that dustbin of an outer sheet. I admire and laugh at it still, though, perhaps, there arises now and then a tear to choke my laughter. It was an

absurd place, yet I loved it ; and maybe if it had been less absurd I should not have loved it so well or remembered it so vividly. It was my youth ; and so many of the men who worked with me there will never work anywhere again.

CHAPTER VI

A DUEL AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

I do not know why Moberly Bell, even in my early days, treated me in a manner so different from his reputed attitude towards most of the other minor members of his big staff. He not only permitted me to establish myself in the City office, as I have told, but when I came at his suggestion to Printing House Square he encouraged me to roam almost at will about the departments. I was nominally a member of Number Seven, the home sub-editors' room, yet I worked upon occasion—there were many occasions—as foreign sub-editor, as night secretary to the editor, and more especially as day secretary. From the first I was the inevitable deputy to Wynnard Hooper, the City editor and financial assistant editor to Mr. Buckle, because I was the only man in Printing House Square, when Hooper was away, who understood the technicalities of the City office. Moberly Bell's attitude of kindly favour towards me, a beginner, may have been due to a recognition of qualities in me which, at a far distance, resembled like qualities in himself. I had in me enough of his own combativeness to stand

up to him, and he loved an opponent, however humble, who would stand up to him. Then, too, I had humour and a turn for persiflage which flashed in response to his own keen humour—and a battle of wits was a rich feast for which he always hungered. I do not know why he was so sympathetic towards my early aspirations—unless it were from that inherent kindliness of his which for most of his staff was covered up by his impulsive savagery—but I know very well, and remember as if it had occurred yesterday, the duel between us, which for him was but a trifling incident, though for me it marked the definite date from which I reckon the rise in my fortunes at Printing House Square. It was a duel which, from the impetuous attack, to the play of sword against sword, and to the gracious salute at the close, first revealed to me Moberly Bell as he really was. From that moment I loved him, and from that moment he began to grant to me—a young man by twenty years his junior—the privilege of his confidence and friendship.

I was acting as deputy to Wynnard Hooper in 1897 and one day a caller upon Moberly Bell—he was one of the many partners in *The Times* as a newspaper—handed to him a dividend notice in a company in which he was interested. Moberly Bell sent this, in the ordinary course, on to me. I prepared the notice for the City columns and sent it out. Now in that notice it was stated that the fixed dividend of, say, five per cent. had been paid upon the preference shares of the company, and that a dividend of, say, ten per cent. had

been declared upon the ordinary shares. Seeing that no company can declare a dividend upon its ordinary shares until the fixed preference dividends have been paid, it was sheer waste of newspaper space to refer to the preference dividend at all. So, in accordance with the invariable and proper practice of the City office, I gave the ordinary dividend and struck out all mention of the preference dividend. It is always the unexpected that happens, and this correct action of mine brought down upon me the furious wrath of Moberly Bell. It appears that the partner, who had given Bell the company notice, called next day and lodged a silly complaint. Some of these partners in the private association which owned the copyright of *The Times* took airs to themselves as 'proprietors,' and I can appreciate, to some degree, the contemptuous hostility towards many of them of Mr. Walter, the governing proprietor. I heard nothing from Bell next day until I arrived home at my flat about one o'clock in the morning—Hooper's job, which I was understudying, was an 'early turn.' Lying on my hall table was a fat letter from Moberly Bell, a perfectly frightful letter to send to a young man who was no more than a beginner on his staff. The letter related my offence—the omission of all reference to that preference dividend—and went on to declare the conviction of Moberly Bell that I, whom he had hitherto regarded as one having intelligence, had shown not only the grossest carelessness but had revealed a stupid incapacity to deal adequately with the smallest and simplest financial

paragraph . . . I won't go on. It was a horrible letter which I burned when the incident was over.

Although I received this letter shortly before turning in it did not seriously disturb my sleep. I have been granted two inestimable physical blessings : I have always been able to sleep soundly no matter the hour of going to bed, and my obstinate good health and good spirits have rarely been disturbed. My appetite for what we called ' blunchfast ' about mid-day was as hearty as for a normal breakfast. I remained awake long enough to resolve to get home upon that devil of a manager, even though he might sack me the next instant. If he did I was quite capable of making a comfortable living outside *The Times* office. So next morning I retorted upon Moberly Bell with a coldly polite and devastating letter. I explained in words of one syllable the difference between a preference share and an ordinary share, and how the declaration of a dividend on ordinary shares made the mention of preference shares quite superfluous. I pointed out that it was only by keeping the City columns to essentials, that we were able to fit the copy to the space—City news was never ' held over to be brought up to date for the outer sheet.' I despatched my letter and awaited my fate. It came the next morning at one o'clock a.m. when I got back to my flat. This time it was a very thin letter, and it ran : " The prisoner is discharged without a stain upon his character. Please come and see me."

I climbed up the wooden stairs in the forenoon and

stood in the entrance to Moberly Bell's room. His great head came round the corner of his desk and his eyes glared at me for a second or two ; then he recognised his visitor and laughed. He hauled his big heavy body out of his chair and limped towards me. " You were quite right," said he ; " I am very sorry about that letter." Then he talked for a minute or two, enquiring how I was getting on, and so dismissed me. That was the real Moberly Bell, impetuous, savage, a heavy slaughterer, but as ready to admit defeat when he was wrong as to rejoice in victory. He occupied a great position in social London—and not only at *The Times* office—his pen was a sharp sword which he loved to employ ; I was an obscure sub-editor twenty years younger than he. Yet because he had done a rank injustice, even to one so insignificant as a sub-editor, he sent for me and apologised to me in the Manager's own Room. A lesser man would have expressed regret by letter ; a small man might have cherished a lasting grudge against me.

I have had many battles since then with that first-class fighting man. It was not possible for anyone to live in close association with Moberly Bell and not to give, or accept, battle at least once a week. Life with Moberly Bell was a constant warfare, yet it was war waged without a trace of personal bitterness. Whether I contrived to pink him, or whether he joyfully skewered me to the floor of his room, made no scrap of difference to our relations. Life was never dull at Printing House Square when there was a Moberly Bell

to fight with. Now and then I have felt almost sorry for Mr. Walter. He must have been conscious during all those years from 1890 to 1908 how much he was overshadowed by that great dominating personality who was his titular subordinate. He must have wished many a time that he had left Bell to the comparative obscurity of Egypt.

That little story of my first brush with Moberly Bell illustrates one of our great difficulties in dealing with our formidable manager. Though he administered the editorial side, he knew next to nothing of the manner in which the editorial side did its work. He often astonished me by the crudity of his notions. He had never worked in a newspaper office and, though a brilliant writer and special correspondent, had rarely, if ever, handled other men's copy in the mass. How a daily newspaper was put together, he had no notion at all; this was partly due to that impossible constitution which cut off the *de facto* manager of *The Times* from all real knowledge of, or control over, the printing department.

Bell's quite delightful ignorance of what a sub-editor did for his pay was revealed during the hearing of a leading law case of *The Times versus* a foreign news agency. This agency during the war between Japan and China, had 'expanded' its telegrams over-generously and had charged *The Times* rates based on the bountiful expansion instead of on the meagre originals. The most striking example of this expansion was the process by which a cable message of two words,

'Wei-hai-wei taken,' grew into a full column of circumstantial and thrilling description. Counsel for the agency tried to establish as a custom of the trade the practice of filling out brief telegraphic messages. He cross-examined Moberly Bell, and enquired whether his own staff at *The Times* office did not always, by means of maps and books of reference and expert knowledge, make intelligible telegrams which, in the raw state, would have been unintelligible. Moberly Bell's superb answer thrilled us : " If a member of *The Times* staff did such a thing as that he would instantly be dismissed." Of course we did just what counsel had suggested every night of our lives, and if we had not done just that thing we should have deserved that instant dismissal. We did not 'expand' telegrams ; we 'elucidated' them, by inserting precisely what the correspondent who sent them expected us to insert and did not waste money in telegraphing. It was part of the regular process of making telegrams both accurate and intelligible.

CHAPTER VII

THE MAN AND HIS JOB

I HAVE indicated that there was a whole world of newspaper administration and of newspaper work which Moberly Bell had never explored and showed no curiosity to explore. But if any reader should draw the conclusion that Moberly Bell's recall from Egypt early in 1890—upon the death of J. C. Macdonald—was not a very happy thought indeed of Mr. Arthur Walter; he would be totally and utterly mistaken. I do not suppose that any man of a courage less superb would have dared to tackle the job which was laid before Moberly Bell. I am quite sure that no other man who did not combine Bell's boundless resource with Bell's dauntless courage could have kept *The Times* alive during eighteen perilous years. There was, indeed, a certain advantage—strange as it may seem—in Moberly Bell's technical ignorance of newspaper administration. For had he realised, as fully as a technical man would quickly have done, what an intractable proposition he was up against even Moberly Bell's high courage might have failed him.

From the first day that he sat down in that manager's

room, with its open door at the top of those wooden stairs, his labours resembled nothing so much as the fabled labours of Sisyphus. *The Times*, as a newspaper, was sliding steadily and remorselessly down the steep hill of bankruptcy. What Bell did, with infinite financial resource and no less infinite patience—for all the native impetuosity of his temper—was to shove *The Times* up a little way, feel it slide down upon him, then to shove it up again a little space, and again to feel it slide down, and so on and so on during eighteen endless years. When the struggle for money with which to carry on at last ended, and Lord Northcliffe poured into his hands the working capital of which *The Times* in its necessity had been starved, Moberly Bell pranced upon his lame feet like some Sinbad from whose aching shoulders the Old Man of the Sea had at length been thrown down. He sloughed years off his age, and I think that 1908, the year of deliverance, despite all its ominous suggestions of future peril to *The Times'* traditions of impartiality and accuracy in news, was the happiest year of Moberly Bell's life. I can find it in my heart now to feel some regret that Moberly Bell was not fated to die in 1908 while the laurel leaves were fresh around his brows. For he was then at the summit of his fame as 'The Man who had Saved *The Times*.' Afterwards men began to see, as he saw himself, that he had not saved *The Times* and all that *The Times* stood for in the life of England.

In 1890 *The Times*, as a newspaper, was facing a prospect in which few gleams of brightness could be



Photo. by Histed

MOBERLY BELL, AT THE AGE OF 55

discerned. Two tremendous financial blows had fallen upon it and left it staggering. Always remember that when I write of *The Times*, as a newspaper, I am referring to the private association of partners which owned the copyright of *The Times*, and owned nothing else. The ownership of the two Walters, Arthur and Godfrey, in the buildings of Printing House Square, and in the perpetual printing contract, was not directly affected by the misfortunes of *The Times*, as a newspaper, so long as it continued to be published, and so long as it earned sufficient from sales and advertisements to pay their rent and to meet the contract charges for their services in printing the paper. Here we have the most vital of those facts, upon the financial side of the business, with which Moberly Bell had to cope as best he might. The rent paid was moderate and fair for very fine buildings erected upon a large and admirable site. But the charges made for printing by obsolete and consequently expensive methods were far larger than *The Times* for many years was in a position to pay. Yet it always did pay; Moberly Bell always somehow did contrive to pay. I will endeavour presently to look at this hereditary conflict between the Walter printing business and *The Times* partnership from what I conceive to have been the point of view of the governing proprietor and his half-brother. They are both dead, and I would not willingly do injustice to the memory of the dead.

The first blow which fell upon *The Times*—a blow which ought to have served as an effective warning of

the dangers inherent in the constitution, yet did not—was the distribution of the large reserve fund which had been most wisely accumulated by the third John Walter to the credit of *The Times* as a newspaper. A newspaper, however firmly it may appear to be established in public regard and support, is one of the most vulnerable of properties. A newspaper, apart from any material assets which it may possess—and *The Times* of the 'nineties possessed none—is simply the 'goodwill' in a few sheets of daily printed paper. If the public continues to buy it and to advertise in it, well and good; but the moment that the public, for whom it seeks to cater, turns aside and ceases to buy it and to advertise in it, it is gone—it is a pricked bubble. So that the third John Walter was most wise, in the prosperous days of *The Times*, to accumulate a large reserve fund, yet most unwise in his failure to realise that an unincorporated partnership, human nature being what it is, will never consent to leave a large reserve fund in the hands of a governing proprietor who, whatever his share in the profits may be, has no rights or powers which can overrule those of the humblest of his fellow partners. As a limited company, with properly drawn articles of association, *The Times*, as a newspaper, could have accumulated and held a reserve fund in the hands of the elected directors. But a loose association of private partners—each one of whom had the full rights and liabilities of a partner—could always rebel against their governing proprietor, and claim the reserve fund as profits withheld from

them as partners. And this, as Moberly Bell has told me many times, is exactly what happened. The private partners rebelled, foolishly claimed that reserve fund, appealed to the courts, and had their short-sighted way. That reserve fund, which alone could have saved *The Times* in its coming troubles, was cut up and devoured by the partners as so much cake.

The second disaster was the direct consequence of the lamentable publication of the forged 'Pigott Letters' and of the costs of the Parnell Commission. No one could now calculate what *The Times* was called upon to pay in cash and in moral credit. The blow to the prestige of *The Times*, to its repute as a vehicle for the honest and accurate presentation of news, shook Printing House Square to its foundations. It took Buckle, and his faithful assistant, J. B. Capper, fully ten years of sleepless devotion to the old traditions of impartiality and of accuracy, to restore the prestige which had been shattered as by a high explosive shell. And the costs of the Parnell Commission, one hundred and twenty eight days of it, with its fabulously expensive counsel—from the Attorney-General downwards—and its army of witnesses, devoured the revenues of *The Times* for years. Bell, who must have known, though he was called in as salvor after the wreck had occurred, put the costs falling upon *The Times* at a quarter of a million. This financial blizzard of the Parnell Commission fell upon the almost naked body of a newspaper which had been stripped of its warm clothing of a reserve fund. It was Moberly Bell, called

in after J. C. Macdonald was dead and the third John Walter was dying, whose endless job it became to thaw the poor frozen victim into life.

Apart from the financial losses which had fallen upon it, and the heavy blow to its prestige, *The Times* as a newspaper remained a power in the life of London and of England. The circulation, after the violent temporary ups and downs of the Pigott shock, steadied at a point not much below the level of the early 'eighties. The high-water mark of the sale of *The Times* was reached in the 'sixties, and the downward movement began in 1869. And how that decline began, after so long a period of continual expansion, is a strange story, which illustrates very well what I said just now about the vulnerability of a newspaper property. It was Ireland in 1869 which began the decline of *The Times*, just as it was Ireland in 1887-1889 which accelerated that decline into a fall. Until the Home Rule split in the Liberal Party of 1885, when Mr. Gladstone suffered his famous conversion, the consistent editorial policy of *The Times* had been to render a general, though critical, support to the government of the day—Conservative or Liberal. It was, I venture to think, a sound policy and a patriotic policy, in the best sense of that grievously ill-used word. *The Times* was—and is again now in these days of happy and most welcome restoration—too great an organ of well-informed public opinion to be harnessed to the fortunes of any one political party. In 1869 *The Times* was still the national paper of England, and it supported the Liberal

Government of the day in its policy of disestablishing the Irish Church. We all now—except maybe a few ecclesiastical zealots—would approve the course then taken by the editor and governing proprietor of *The Times*. But that support which was given to Mr. Gladstone's Government cost *The Times* an immediate and heavy loss in its circulation. It was the favourite daily journal of the English country parson who, if he could not afford the whole cost of it, shared it with a parishioner. These English country parsons deserted *The Times* in droves. The figures, which I have often studied, show a big drop, then some recovery, then a settling down at a level substantially below the sales of 1869. It was some years after the abrupt falling off due to the Irish Church controversy that there began the drip, drip, drip, year after year, of old readers of *The Times* dying off and not being replaced by their successors. By the 'nineties this drip, slow though it appeared when taking one year with another, had become an occasion for most serious anxiety. That anxiety never lifted from Moberly Bell's mind. He became his own circulation manager, and studied with unflagging energy the problem of how to bandage that unstaunched wound through which was draining away the life blood of the newspaper.

On the advertisement side *The Times* of the 'nineties was still fairly strong. Most of the 'smalls' had been taken away by *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Morning Post* because it was nobody's business to look after them. *The Times* of the 'sixties was as closely packed

with 'smalls' as are to-day *The Daily Telegraph* or *The Glasgow Herald*. It is related—I tell it as a story without vouching for its accuracy—that in the mid-Victorian age *The Times* advertisement department used to close down for luncheon every day, and that *The Daily Telegraph*—which had set up an office hard by Printing House Square—scooped up all the small 'ads.' brought by people who could not get past the closed doors of *The Times* office. Whatever may be the true explanation—I suspect there are many explanations—the loss of small advertisements must have been the direct consequence of neglect, and of a 'superior' inability to be "aware of the existence of *The Daily Telegraph*." For a long while *The Times* refused to admit what we call 'display advertisements,' but those days of lofty exclusiveness had passed before I set foot in the Square. Moberly Bell, though he did not provide himself with a skilled advertisement manager—as he might with advantage have done—did whatever he could to encourage large advertisements of a good class, and was moderately successful. When one reflects upon his disabilities, and his lack of specialist training, he succeeded wonderfully well. He wielded a vast inspiring and driving force which set his subordinates working devotedly, though he himself was not very skilful at organising their lines of work. Nevertheless, but for Moberly Bell's exodus from Egypt in 1890, I much doubt whether there would have been any Printing House Square in active operation for me to enter five or six years later.

Moberly Bell was good at figures and no mean accountant, though he went at his work in a typical English way. Most of his calculations of costs and revenue were worked out on the backs of old envelopes. He would thrust a crumpled bundle of these scribbled envelopes into my hands and immediately discourse to me upon them. I needed to have a quick eye to keep pace with him. He never would accept any figures of mine because, he said, I was a Wrangler, and no Wrangler since the Mathematical Tripos began had ever been known to add up correctly. He loved to reduce everything, revenue and expenses of all kinds, to so much per column. He would adopt handsome round figures per column "so as to leave a margin," and brought out results the most untrustworthy. He had the notion of a costing system, yet omitted that close and accurate measurement in detail without which a costing system can be made to show anything.

And now let me try to comprehend and set forth the point of view of the two men upon whom, by their retention of the old constitution with its duality of ownership, must always rest a large part of the responsibility for the financial troubles of the old *Times*. It is not enough merely to say that they were country gentlemen who had succeeded by inheritance to the task which would have strained the capacity of men of the highest competence and most intensive training. For had expert advice been called in, they must quickly have discovered that the methods of their hereditary printing business were out of date and too costly to be borne in days of

severe competition. Their caseroom staff was at least one third larger than would have been required to operate a modern plant. They were both honourable men, sprung of an honourable stock, both of them regarded their connection with *The Times* as their chief title to public honour. They were not Walters of Printing House Square—a pair of minor landowners in London—or Walters of the printing business—a pair of printers—they were Walters of *The Times*. Their reputations, and their fortunes too—as they must have often realised—were bound up in the continued success of *The Times* as a newspaper. Why, then, were they both unable to foresee, or at any rate to apprehend, the inevitable consequences which would befall them if *The Times* as a newspaper came to grief and was ordered by the courts to be sold? They could not have supposed that a purchaser, once the private partnership had been dissolved, would grant to them any large compensation for the loss of an hereditary printing contract.

I fancy that most human motives are fairly simple when one has to do with English gentlemen of the sahib class. The Walters, I believe, held on to their printing contract and to its emoluments in the same spirit in which they held on to their buildings and their rent. They were manifestly entitled to a just rent upon their buildings, and they deemed themselves to be equally as fully entitled to their long established property in the revenues derived from printing *The Times*. The printing business had become in their eyes a freehold with which the partnership owning

The Times had nothing to do except to pay the contract price. If we accept this view, then we can understand how two men of high personal character maintained a needlessly burdensome system right down to the sale of *The Times* to the Northcliffe interests in 1908, and to the settlement which wiped their printing business off the map. When Kennedy Jones and his experts studied their printing department and its charges in 1908—and 'K. J.' was the highest authority of his day in newspaper production—the conclusion reached was that the immediate saving to be effected by the introduction of modern plant would make all the difference between success and failure of *The Times* as a newspaper.

There is this further consideration from the assumed point of view of the two Walters. Their printing business employed a large staff of men who had grown grey in the Walter service. The introduction of linotype or monotype machines would have involved the dismissal of considerable numbers of these old servants. This is what actually happened after the Northcliffe purchase. The Walter business was a patriarchal business, and one can both appreciate and admire the reluctance of its proprietors to see it destroyed and its staff thinned by wholesale dismissals. In the end a Northcliffe reconstruction was more fatal in casualties to the men than would have been an earlier Walter reconstruction. As in so many other ways, the Walters were living in a world of the past and had not become conscious of the new harshly-competitive world which was surging around them.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BIRTH OF A LEGEND

THOUGH English on both sides of the house, and English in tough fibre to the core of his being, Moberly Bell, that direct, forceful, combative creature, both physically and morally fearless, was by many believed to be of Oriental blood. The curved beak of his nose and his long residence in Egypt may have persuaded the unobservant in national characteristics that there was somewhere an Arab sire in his pedigree. The Oriental myth has been most persistent. Kennedy Jones, the 'K. J.' of many a stout fight with 'M. B.,' put the absurd statement in his book *Fleet Street and Downing Street* that Moberly Bell was of "Levantine extraction." It scarcely needed the prompt correction of Bell's widow to satisfy those who had known him intimately that Moberly Bell was English of the English in blood and in sentiment. Yet the myth still lingers and now and then reveals itself. I was telling a friend not long since that I was engaged upon this book. He himself was a newspaper proprietor who must have met Bell. "Was not Moberly Bell half a Copt?" he enquired. And then we have had recently a quotation by Sir Frederick Macmillan of a passage in Wilfrid Blunt's

diary which has called forth an explicit letter of explanation and contradiction from Mrs. Moberly Carver, Bell's sister and only surviving member of his family generation. Sir Frederick Macmillan, on the appearance of Mrs. Carver's letter, of course at once suppressed the unhappy passage in his work, *The Net Book Agreement*.

Mrs. Moberly Carver's letter which was published in *The Times* of August 8, 1924, must finally dispose in the minds of all rational people of the Oriental myth of Bell's origin. It ran as follows :

To the EDITOR of *The Times*.

SIR,—A book recently written and published by Sir Frederick Macmillan contains misstatements as to the name and origin of my brother, Charles Frederic Moberly Bell, which I, as the only surviving member of his generation of our family, feel bound to refute. Our father was Thomas Bell, the son of James Bell and Elizabeth Moberly, who was an aunt of George Moberly, headmaster of Winchester and Bishop of Salisbury : therefore my father and the Bishop were first cousins. As a young man our father went to Alexandria to the house of Peel and Co., the then premier merchant house in Egypt. There we were all born, and my brother, after being educated in England, returned to join the same firm. He and I were the youngest of the family and all through our lives we lived near each other, first in Egypt, then in London. There is no 'mystery' in our origin. I am now over eighty years of age and what I write is from personal knowledge.

Yours faithfully,

LOUISA MOBERLY CARVER.

Ingarsby, Wimbledon, S.W. 19, Aug. 6.

In an article which I wrote on Moberly Bell last year for *The Cornhill Magazine* I gave one version of a fantastic legend which led directly to an interesting discovery. This was that the legend was the bright invention of that whimsical humorist Pember Reeves. One day Reeves told to an appreciative audience how Moberly Bell, summoned home from Egypt in 1890 by Mr. Arthur Walter, had never arrived. He had been wrecked upon a Greek island and been scuppered, together with all his companions, by a Greek brigand. The brigand had then possessed himself of Bell's papers and proceeded to England to manage *The Times Gazeta* in his stead. It was an excellent story and Pember Reeves, much pleased with it, went on telling it and improving upon it until one day old Frederic Harrison frightened Reeves by remarking "Yes, I have heard that that is so." Nothing is so absurd that it cannot find believers. From that moment Pember Reeves stopped the telling of his legend, but in one form or another it continued in circulation and may be alive still.

Sir Rennell Rodd writes that Lord Kitchener, believed by his admiring fellow countrymen to be of plain, direct, typically English mind, had acquired through long residence in Egypt a distinctly Oriental twist. He became, Sir Rennell Rodd says, tortuous in his habits of mind and even in his ways. The surprising thing about Moberly Bell was that, though he had lived in Egypt during the exceedingly Oriental despotic reign of the Khedive Ismail—and was on

intimate terms with members of the Khedival family—the colour of the East had left not the slightest tinge upon his Western mind. He might never have resided east of Ramsgate. He was the straightest and most direct man, even brutally direct man, whom I have ever known. When he chose he could be diplomatic in method, and compellingly diplomatic in manner, but he would have agreed with Bismarck that if one seeks to confound an opponent utterly one always is careful to speak the truth. I have met men who asserted that Moberly Bell was a liar; with all respect I suggest that they may have been mistaken. Moberly Bell was one of those devastating truth-tellers who for the sake of our own self-respect persuade us that, as regards ourselves at any rate, he must have been a liar. If I wanted a man to flatter me by softening down my own faults and weaknesses I should not go to the like of Moberly Bell. But if in my youth I had wanted a man with whom to go shooting tigers in the jungle afoot, Moberly Bell would have been my partner all the time, though he was lame of one foot and hobbled painfully on the other.

CHAPTER IX

MY ADVENTURES OUTSIDE

My first period of Printing House Square came to an end in the autumn of 1901. I then went outside and, though continuing to contribute regularly to *The Times*, was no longer in receipt of a salary. The three years which followed were for me a period of very great interest; in the course of them I fought my own individual fight in the market place, the one most essential of all fights for any journalist and writer who seeks to establish a reputation upon which he may plant his own feet, and stand independent of the favours of editors or publishers. When in 1901 I gave up a salary of £300 a year—which was the utmost sum that could be wrung out of Moberly Bell—I was no more than a handy man who, though his connection outside Printing House Square was growing fast, could not look to any promotion within the walls of the Square itself. All lines of possible advance were barred. The editor's room—even if it would have admitted one of my sacrilegious temper—was occupied by Buckle, Capper, and Bruce Richmond, all of whom remained there from ten to twelve years longer. Moberly Bell's management side

was a one-man show, and nothing less than the cataclysm of 1907-8 could have persuaded him to appoint a deputy manager to the position which eventually I did occupy. The City office was in the possession of Hartley Withers, and the chief responsibility for financial articles and news rested in the hands of Wynnard Hooper. Both Withers and Hooper were still in possession at the time when I departed for Glasgow. It will be seen that the judgment which I formed in 1901, that all these lines were barred to me, was sound, and was by subsequent facts demonstrated to be sound. So out I went, and after three years of successful navigation of my own little bark came back to Printing House Square as a departmental editor on the wave of reform which in 1904 was flowing strongly.

The immediate cause of my decision to depart was a coolness which had for some time been approaching the temperature of frost in my relations with Moberly Bell. I learned afterwards how unbearable, beyond even his colossal strength, the labours of Sisyphus had become. The circulation of *The Times* was disappearing down that drain of the deaths column which appeared daily in what printers called 'The Hotch.' Those others in the daily hotch, those who were born or were married, could no longer be depended upon to take the place in the future of those who had died. Money was desperately tight, in spite of temporary relief from profits on sales of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. The printing business was taking its daily toll of revenue from sales and advertisements, and that

revenue was shrinking as remorselessly as did Balzac's *Peau de Chagrin*. Poor Bell, with all these troubles bearing hardly upon him, could not have been expected to tolerate the importunities of a young ambitious fellow who was playing his own hand and was always looking for bigger and more profitable opponents against whom to play it. Nevertheless, he always was good to me. In 1900 I put before him a scheme for a half-yearly financial reference book to be published by *The Times*, and to be edited and prepared (of course) by me. He accepted my suggestions, and we brought out two issues at appalling labour to me and at some small loss to *The Times*. Just then Moberly Bell could not afford to continue any side show which was not immediately profitable, so we agreed to drop *The Financial Half-Year*, of which I expect the only two copies in existence have rested for more than twenty years in my own bookshelves.

One morning Moberly Bell came into the secretary's room where I was working for a short spell after my own venture had come to an end. He asked rather brusquely and pointedly: "Well, what are you going to do now?" "I suppose," replied I, "that I had better go outside." "The sooner the better," snapped Bell. He was exceedingly cross, excusably, and I too had begun to think that my colleagues were right when they called the manager a beast. So we parted unkindly, and yet the Fates must have laughed when this brief closing interview was recorded upstairs. For, within six months, I was in high favour as a contri-

butor, and when three years later Moberly Bell wanted to establish a *Financial and Commercial Supplement*, to do for the larger fields of finance and commerce what the *Literary Supplement* was already doing for literature, he at once called me in to do the job for him. He gave me the terms I asked; he and Buckle allowed me to take a blank sheet of paper and produce under their auspices the kind of supplement which commended itself to me, and they always thenceforward backed me up whatever I might do. No departmental editor could possibly have been allowed by his chiefs a hand more free or a responsibility more completely personal. Which is exactly what I have always sought and not infrequently found.

My plan of campaign for my fight in the market place was not spectacular, yet as it met with immediate financial success—a success which increased with each year—the simple principles upon which it was based may be of interest to my professional brethren—especially to those younger ones who may have to face my problems and to look, hopefully, towards my solution. It does not matter very much what one is selling—whether it be books, financial articles, motor cars, or button hooks—provided that one can produce a saleable commodity. Production is easy enough; the difficulty is the market. Whenever a man, who understands business, seeks to put upon the market a commodity in which he feels confidence he first organises the selling end. This is vital. It is of no use at all to start on production until one has quite definitely

planned out and organised the selling end. The incalculable advantage which I possessed over my contemporaries in journalism was my practical training in business for four years with two great insurance companies. As an actuarial clerk in a life assurance office I had learned that the issue of life assurance policies on sound lines is no trouble at all in comparison with the trouble of selling them. The selling end is by so much the more important than the production end that it is everything. After this most valuable training—which would have been every whit as useful for any other business as it was for the practice of independent journalism—I was equipped as not one of my possible competitors was equipped. They might have produced better stuff than I did, but not one of them could surpass me in the art of making a market. Fiction I did sometimes write 'on spec.'—fiction was then, and has always remained, a delightfully fascinating adventure with me; not a main business—but I never, once I had established some kind of a reputation for my own specialities, wrote financial or commercial articles for which I had not prepared my market in advance. This procedure yielded three advantages: it economised labour; it ensured my articles being published while they were fresh and hot; and it kept me from cheapening my wares. Long before my two and a half years of complete independence had come to an end my market was so secure and responsive that it suggested contributions to me at least as often as I suggested contributions

to it. I could deal with a financial or commercial subject, of topical news interest, in half a dozen different ways and be certain of selling all the six versions as readily as I could sell one version. And this was in 1901-1904, some years before editors of daily and weekly papers had become so fully awakened as they are now to the economic basis of nearly every topic of political or social controversy.

Just as I was the one man among my contemporaries in daily journalism who had been trained to perceive and to organise the selling end, so I was the one man who had grasped the value of a technical acquaintance with insurance in the professional equipment of a writer on finance and commerce. Insurance may sound to many a dull subject ; it is certainly in the eyes of most people a mysterious subject. Actually there is nothing dull or mysterious about it. There is no business, not even banking, which touches human life and human interests at so many points, and from the study of which so much may be learned. Consider its points of contact with humanity : it concerns such closely personal matters as our lives, our health and our safety when crossing the street or travelling about the world ; it protects us from the financial hazards of almost any conceivable risks to our property. A study of marine insurance leads us immediately on to shipping and transport generally ; incidentally one learns a powerful lot about commercial geography. Fire insurance makes contact with every kind of business process—and intimate contact too. A conflagration

or an earthquake is news, and most important news. We insure our motor cars and our public liability for using them; we insure our houses against burglary and our valuables against theft. A vast system of national insurance against the losses of sickness has been developed, and workmen's compensation for accidents has grown from a common law liability of employers into an almost universal protection for those who earn their living by wages or small salaries. If I had deliberately taken up with insurance in 1892 with the intention of using it subsequently in journalism, I could not have made a choice of training more happy or more valuable. Of course, my original purpose was simply to escape from teaching school, and to turn my mathematical equipment to commercial account. It was the itch in my writing hand and in my subconscious mind which drove me out of insurance—where I should have made a large fortune—into journalism where I have made no fortune at all. But I took insurance with me into journalism as a key which has never failed to unfasten many locks. With that key in my hands—it turned with the years into a whole bunch of keys—and with those four years of training in the importance of the selling end—I have been protected from serious competition. Not once since the day on which J. Spencer Balfour, Esq., M.P., became the criminal 'Jabez,' and revealed to me the market for which I was searching, has the competition of my contemporaries ever affected me at all. I have always taken my own line, made my own market, and

competitors have not existed as factors to be reckoned with. It will be understood, of course, that I am referring to my financial and commercial journalism and not to my fiction—in fiction I have unfortunately not been able to corner any section of the market. After all, one cannot have everything. No one has yet succeeded in completely cornering wheat.

It is amusing now to look back to the early years of this century, to a time when daily journalism was almost wholly anonymous, and to recall how three men—quite unknown to the public, though fairly well known in the City of London—held a grip upon financial journalism as strong as that of the famous professional triumvirate over golf championships. The City triumvirate were A. W. Kiddy, Hartley Withers, and Harcourt Kitchin. Withers had not then struck oil as a financial 'best seller' with *The Meaning of Money*, and although I was a fairly steady contributor of stories to *The Cornhill Magazine* my identity was still, and for long afterwards, pasted over with the label of Bennet Copplestone. From 1904 onwards—one might almost say until the present day, though Withers has retired into the country to keep pigs—any daily paper of standing in London which wanted a financial editor used to turn to one of us. Kiddy was entrenched in the City office of *The Standard* until his well-furnished dug-out tumbled in under the shells which brought down *The Standard* as an old morning journal. Then he went over to *The Morning Post*, where he remains and discharges the functions—as

extras—of editor of *The Bankers' Magazine* and financial correspondent of *The Spectator*. The true financial journalist is never happy unless he has two or three 'extras.' In 1905, when *The Tribune* was being organised, I was invited to become its financial editor. But after an interview or two with Thomasson and his managing editor I regarded the fortunes of *The Tribune* as too hazardous for the investment of my professional capital. So I declined. Hartley Withers was then offered the job and accepted it, to my horror. He would have gone to *The Tribune* and suffered with so many others in its collapse if I had not organised a cutting-out expedition and rescued him. He was discontented just then with his treatment by *The Times*—and most justly discontented—so I prevailed upon Moberly Bell to make him an offer worthy of his acceptance. Withers is one of those horribly conscientious men who are the despair of their old friends, yet on this occasion I managed to persuade him that to chuck *The Tribune* and to stick to *The Times* was not a lapse into dishonour. Moberly Bell and Hartley Withers were never sympathetic, yet Bell, when he recommended to Mr. Walter that Withers should be given the rank and salary of a City editor, paid him a pretty compliment. "The worst thing I have against Withers," said he, "is his persistence in worrying me to improve the position of his staff at the City office." In 1906 Fabian Ware, who was then editor of *The Morning Post*, invited me to join him as financial editor and I accepted. This time it was Moberly

Bell who intervened with an offer which, coming from him, I could not possibly refuse. Some years later Hartley Withers became City editor of *The Morning Post* and, later still, A. W. Kiddy succeeded him, so that of the three members of the City triumvirate all, at one time or another, were offered and accepted the financial editorship of *The Morning Post*, though one of them withdrew his acceptance. Kiddy, Withers and I were each one of us in the first rank at our own jobs. I was by a long way inferior to either Kiddy or Withers in the technical experience of pure City journalism—the money market and the stock exchange—but I made up for that by my wider experience and interests in the finance and practice of insurance, shipping, transport, and a good many other useful subjects. In our day—and we are not dead yet—we had no serious competitors. We have lasted at least as long as that other, and better known, triumvirate of professional golfers.

When in 1901 I accepted Moberly Bell's blunt hint that I should pack up and go outside Printing House Square I had already taken on a partner of whose existence no one at the Square (except Hamilton Fyfe) had any suspicion. Bennet Copplestone was born into the world in 1898, and his birth was the occasion of one of the most joyous diversions in my life. If it were not true, every word, the story of this experience would be incredible. I had begun to write and sell exceedingly bad stories at the age of fifteen, and my first guinea received at that age was my fatal enlistment fee into the

service of the Queen of Printers' Ink. I had gone on trying to write stories until by 1897, after a long discipline in trial and error, rejection and re-writing, I had acquired some grasp of the essential technique. By word of mouth I could always tell stories effectively, yet when it came to writing them down my skill in presentation proved to be insufficient. In 1897 I was standing one afternoon looking at a workman at the Bank of England packing gold bars into cases for export. The bars, looking just like dull yellow Roman bricks, lay about the yard, and the workman—receiving, one may suppose, about two pounds a week—handled these lumps of concentrated buying power, worth £2000 each, as indifferently as a bricklayer handles bricks. There and then I composed a story in my head of a robbery of one of the cases containing gold bars which I saw being packed. The climax of this story turned upon the problem before a robber—an amateur robber ignorant of 'fences'—when he came to dispose of solid blocks of fine gold. He was not a jeweller, a bullion broker, or engaged at the Mint. He was just an amateur criminal who had not looked after that all-important selling end before he took up with crime. In my story the thief, distracted by this load of gold which had become a perilous liability rather than a glittering asset, at last put his share of the bars into two kitbags, hauled them down to Waterloo Bridge, and pitched them into the river. The story, with its wealth of accurate detail, carried conviction to me and, in writing it, I conveyed conviction to the

reader. It was quite the best story that I had yet turned out. Now the fun begins.

I sent the story to *Chambers' Journal*, a magazine in which I had placed already one or two little things. Almost by return of post my MS. came back with the usual printed slip of rejection. I read my story carefully over and satisfied myself that it was good—after the cold fit of rejection has followed upon the hot fit of composition a writer can criticise his own work if he be honest with himself. I determined to fly high with this story of *A Great Gold Robbery* and sent it off to *The Cornhill Magazine*. Those who knew the late Reginald Smith will guess what resulted. He wrote to me almost immediately, with his own hand, such a letter to a beginner as only he could write or would take the trouble to write. He spoke most kindly of my story, said that he had accepted it with pleasure, and would I remember him when I had any other stories to offer. It was, I repeat, the delicately encouraging friendly letter of which Reginald Smith alone held the compelling secret. My story was published in *The Cornhill Magazine* of April 1898, signed Bennet Copplestone. I had sent it originally to *Chambers' Journal* under my own name, but had decided to adopt my other name between Smith's acceptance of it and the date of publication. It seemed to me then—and my judgment was obviously sound—that if a comparatively unknown man named Harcourt Kitchin took to putting forth grave financial articles with one hand and fiction with the other, he would

most admirably succeed in spoiling both his markets. His financial articles would be suspected of dealing in fiction, and his stories would be suspected of being a vehicle for handing out dull fact. The combination of instruction with amusement has always been justly repellent to all classes of readers. So I took the name of Coplestone from an old Devonshire family—who when the Conqueror came were all at home—and Bennet sounded a pleasing note which harmonised with it.

In less than a week after this story appeared came a letter for me addressed to "Bennet Coplestone, Esq.," at the office of *Cornhill*. It was from the editor of *Chambers' Journal*. He wrote that he had been much attracted by my excellent story, *A Great Gold Robbery*, in *Cornhill* and would I do him the favour to submit any further stories of mine to him. There was no word of that rejection slip which he—or one of his underlings—had sent to "Harcourt Kitchin, Esq." some months earlier. I might stop here and offer a prize for the best answer to the question: "What did Bennet Coplestone then do?" What I did do was to reply, thanking the editor of *Chambers' Journal* for his kind letter, and accepting his offer that I should send him some stories. I signed that letter Bennet Coplestone; I sold three or four stories to *Chambers' Journal*, paid the cheques drawn to Bennet Coplestone into the account of Harcourt Kitchin, and never made the editor aware—until this moment—of the awful brick which he, or one of his assistants, had dropped.

You may call this procedure tact or prudence, as you please ; I call it business. I should not even have got a laugh out of the discomfiture of the editor of *Chambers' Journal* (of which I should not have been a witness) and I should have sacrificed many guineas. As it was, the letters of appreciation to " Bennet Copplestone, Esq.," and the cheques drawn to " Bennet Copplestone or Order," became a recurrent source of joy to me.

A few months after going outside Printing House Square I 'discovered' Lloyd's. It is true that the Corporation of Lloyd's and its members had been engaged upon their lawful occasions for quite a long time before I did them the honour to discover them, but as 'news' they can scarcely be considered to have existed. An aphorism of mine given in an early chapter of this book may be repeated : "*News* does not depend upon the occurrence of events but upon the presence of reporters." For all the use that the very interesting operations of members of Lloyd's were to the daily press they might have been transacted in Mars. And since in the view of the true blue journalist—with which colour I claim to be deeply dyed in the wool—the world and all its wonders exist merely to be turned into news, Lloyd's was running to sheer waste. It was as deplorable a waste of news as the invasion of western Europe by the Huns. I had from my early connection rapidly got into touch with the leading authorities in life, fire, and accident insurance, and satisfied them that I comprehended the vital distinction between information conveyed to me

as information, and information intended to be turned into news. Once a collector of news from the great ones grasps that vital distinction, and may be depended upon strictly to observe it, his path is smooth. The really big people will talk freely to him, and he will discover and cherish the important maxim—which should be inscribed in letters of gold in every editorial room: “It is not what you know and put into the paper which counts; it is what you know and do *not* put into the paper.” It is always what a correspondent or an editor knows and does *not* put into his paper which compels the trust of his informants, and gives to his paper the indefinable yet unmistakable stamp of being ‘well informed.’ Whatever depths may have been sounded in these latter days by editors and proprietors in the conduct of their journals, British newspaper correspondents and reporters have, with few exceptions, grasped in theory and put into practice the maxim which has been set forth above. They are trusted by their informants as the representatives of no foreign journals are trusted.

There is a further maxim which may be regarded as the corollary of this one. It is that “the bigger the man the more informative he is.” No correspondent or reporter, who understands his business, and represents a responsible newspaper, ever wastes time over underlings. If he does he will never learn more than the underling knows—which is not much—or than the underling will dare to tell him—which is less still. The big men, whether in politics or in business, are

the people to get hold of and to cultivate ; they know and they are not afraid to talk—always provided that the man to whom they talk has convinced them of his thorough appreciation of the vital distinction between information which is informative, and information which is intended to be retailed as news.

As my market expanded and became able to take as much fresh good stuff as I was able to produce, my thoughts inevitably turned towards Lloyd's. Here was a busy hive transacting every day lots of fascinating business, in touch with shipping and sea casualties, earthquakes, hurricanes, war risks, peace risks (such as twins), thefts of gold and jewels, piracy, barratry, flotsam, jetsam, and legend. The market of Lloyd's reeked of romance, and of romance most reprehensibly wasted. My first thought, after deciding in my own mind that I had been destined to tear away the veil which for generations had enshrouded the operations of Lloyd's, was that selling end which I always secured before bothering my head about production. So off I wrote to Moberly Bell and offered a daily brief report about Lloyd's. At the moment of my offer I had made no attempt, not the slightest, to get into touch with a single member of Lloyd's, and to discover whether I could deliver the goods. That problem would be considered later; the first essential, as always, was to secure the selling market. Back at once came a letter from Bell telling me to get on with it. A period of editorial reforms was setting in at Printing House Square and Moberly Bell was every bit as keen

to buy financial and commercial news as I was to sell it. The three main props of *The Times* were Parliament and politics, foreign intelligence, and City news. This immediate acceptance by Moberly Bell of my offer meant a good deal to me, for if I could supply this daily Lloyd's report, in addition to the paragraphs which I was already doing for the City office, and my special articles (in the outer sheet), I should be drawing a safe £500 a year for part of my time out of the paper which three months earlier had paid me a beggarly £300 a year for nearly the whole of my working day. All that I had to achieve now was a conquest over the production end.

It was the toughest job which I have ever struck. At first I was confronted by a sheer blank wall. I started naturally with marine insurance and was at once told that marine underwriters and brokers had no sort of use for newspaper men. So I had to satisfy them that though they rightly held aloof from newspaper men there was one Newspaper Man who understood their ways and was worthy of their confidence. It was an exceedingly tough job, yet bit by bit I wore opposition down. A few of the marine company underwriters—men who sit at the receipt of custom, accessible to all who pass their swing doors on business—began to soften. I started my daily marine insurance notes in *The Times*, and presently they began to attract notice. Mr. Sidney Boulton, a new member of the committee of Lloyd's (afterwards chairman), helped me from the first; let this stand as an acknow-

ledgment of his kindness. Firms of brokers began to help me : Willis, Faber ; Hartley, Cooper ; Henry Head and others. Within a few months I had secured a connection and thereafter it grew and grew. My notes—which were taken over by my successor and pupil and now are incorporated in the City notes of *The Times*—rapidly became a feature which every man in the marine insurance market read each morning. Then that happened which always happens when the news of a market is efficiently collected and intelligently presented ; underwriters and brokers began to seek me instead of repelling me when I sought them. My early toil changed into exceedingly pleasant work ; I made hosts of useful and pleasant friends, many of whom are still my friends. To this day, though I have not gone round the marine insurance market in pursuit of news for seventeen years, I can drop into the City and stroll down Cornhill and be sure of a kindly greeting from my friends of old. Underwriters of my active days may have retired, some of them may be dead, but those who once were deputies sit in the underwriting chairs and are as heartily my friends as were their former chiefs. News collection of this special kind is purely personal, and the confidence of a market once won is as valuable a piece of property to a journalist as a freehold.

I was lunching not long since at the City Club with three members of a Lloyd's firm who had supported me almost from the first. They contrasted my lot in life with their own and professed to envy me. We,

said they, have done nothing in the world except make money ; we have made stacks of it, and it is no sort of use to us. We can't retire, because all of us want to retire at once, and then no partners would be left in the business. " As for you, Bennet," they went on, " you have had all the fun that there is. You have made a sufficient income to live on comfortably and to send your sons and daughter to the best schools. You have these twenty years past met all the people who were worth meeting, from prime ministers, artists, and poets down to marine insurance brokers. You are a damned lucky fellow, Bennet, old thing." And as I heard my friends talk like this, and heard them lament that there was " No golf course in the City," I felt satisfaction that I had, nearly thirty years earlier, cut the practice of insurance—with its plums of ten or fifteen thousand a year—and played my own hand as a journalist, editor, and writer of novels. It has all been very great fun.

I owe my grateful thanks to the members of Lloyd's and to the officials of marine insurance companies who helped me so generously after those ramparts at the beginning had been breached ; but the real founders of my fortunes at Printing House Square were the Committee of Lloyd's who, in or about 1904, tried to get me suppressed. This is another of those stories which would be incredible if it were not true. If the members of the present committee will look up the correspondence which took place—in, I think, 1904—between Sir Henry Hozier, the secretary of Lloyd's, and Moberly Bell of *The Times*, they will find all the

evidence necessary to corroborate what I now tell. The official effort of the committee of Lloyd's—which, as a committee, had then nothing directly to do with the insurance operations of the members—to get rid of Harcourt Kitchin as a dangerous nuisance, arose out of the war risk insurances placed during the Russo-Japanese war. When the Russian Baltic fleet was about to set sail for Japanese waters I was able to inform *The Times* by what route it would steer and to give in advance almost an itinerary of its movements. I was not deliberately indiscreet, yet being first of all a newspaper man I made the most of what was first-class news of the day. It was, I think, a little later that the official pot boiled over at Lloyd's and Sir Henry Hozier, as secretary, wrote to Bell, recounting my misdemeanours, and pointing out what a menace to business I had become. Meanwhile my friends in the market shrieked with laughter—they included members of the committee itself—and plied me with more information than ever. The incident was made the more humorous by Sir Henry Hozier's quite evident distaste for his task. He had been *The Times* special correspondent during the seven weeks' war between Prussia and Austria in the 'sixties. Still, he did his loyal best. Moberly Bell sent for me; he showed me Hozier's letter and his own reply in which he stripped off poor Hozier's skin and hung it up to dry. It was not a correspondence which lasted very long—though Bell, who enjoyed it enormously, would have gone on for months—yet for me it was of the

greatest importance and interest. It is not possible for anyone to do a greater service to a newspaper correspondent than to try to suppress him. From that moment all Moberly Bell's managerial reserves fell. He had himself been a *Times* correspondent, and intimately appreciated my feelings of proud joy. From that day onwards I was a made man in Bell's eyes and in my own. I had already become editor of the *Financial and Commercial Supplement*, and continued my daily work in the marine insurance market and generally in the City.

There is another incident which occurred about the same time which richly flavours my recollections. This was the part which I played in the second, and positively last, attempt to save *The Pilot* from extinction. This weekly review, founded by D. C. Lathbury, had already stopped once and then gone hobbling along again. I was writing a weekly signed article, and the principal proprietor—who has since held office in a Liberal Cabinet—asked me to 'vet' the paper, and to advise him if it were worth keeping on. So I examined the books, cross-questioned the business staff, and made my report. I advised that large economies could be made and recommended a course which, if sufficient capital were put up, might lead the paper round that 'corner' which in Fleet Street takes such a lot of rounding. It is as formidable as Cape Horn ever was to navigators in the days of sailing ships. It marks a stage in a newspaper's fortunes when the revenue becomes sufficient to meet the expenditure. My

report was considered at a meeting of the proprietor, Lathbury the editor, various officials, and the writer. Lathbury, who by the constitution of *The Pilot* was editor-for-life, strongly opposed my scheme, but as the proprietor declared that he would put up no more money unless my scheme were adopted, we parted company, apparently the victors; I mean the proprietor and I. I was instructed to get going on my reforms. Upon the Saturday following I received a wire from the proprietor: "Look at *The Pilot* and see what Lathbury has done." I had not yet opened my copy of *The Pilot*. When I did I saw, framed in the middle of the first page, an announcement of the paper's demise. Lathbury, overruled by the money power, had retorted as editor-for-life, and had stopped the paper on his own responsibility. At my next meeting with the proprietor, with whose property Lathbury had made so free, we were divided between curses and laughter. I don't suppose that there had ever been such a situation even in that wonderful Fleet Street as a paper stopped by its editor over the head of its proprietor. Still, it had been done and, being done, it was not worth while to resuscitate *The Pilot* for a second time.

My adventures outside Printing House Square ranged over a wider ground than journalism. In 1903, seeking fresh woods in which to gambol, I joined the London School of Economics as appointed teacher in insurance. I delivered two courses of lectures on the principles and finance of fire insurance to a

very good lot of students, and then published my lectures in a book, which was as successful as such books can be. So with my two courses of practically the same set of lectures, and the book, I sold one batch of copy three times over—which is the ideal of every professional writer. Some writers of stories sell them much more often than that in different forms and markets. There was nothing highly eventful about this work at the London School of Economics, but it had a sequel the most embarrassing. The Senate of London University—or whatever the body with authority to do so—had added insurance to the subjects upon which a Bachelor of Science in Economics might present a thesis for the degree of Doctor. A year or so later, when I had ceased to lecture though I remained on the books of the School of Economics as an appointed teacher, a Bachelor of Science came along and slung in a thesis for the Doctorate dealing with the early history of insurance. He had done a vast amount of research work and carried the subject back to about the time of Tutankhamen. I was aghast, for as sole appointed teacher it fell to me to examine this candidate, and my knowledge of the early history of insurance would not have furbished up a shilling textbook. I had had quite enough to do to keep up with the modern developments. Still, there was no way of escape, until I perceived one in an official request to nominate a second examiner to act with me according to the laws of the University. Then I leaped to the opportunity and nominated the late Sir Douglas Owen,

who had been for many years secretary of the marine department of the Alliance Assurance Company, and was as real an authority as I was a humbug. The services since then of Douglas Owen to his country form an important part of the history of the War ; as Chairman of the Government War Risks Committee he did as much as any man could do to keep the British, Allied, and neutral mercantile marines at work on the seas all through the years of war. Owen was, of course, appointed at once, and I exercised my right as the senior examiner to turn over the thesis first to him. He went to a great deal of trouble with it, wrote a long and learned report upon it, and recommended that the Doctorate should be granted to the author. All that I had to do then was to read the thesis, concur in Douglas Owen's recommendation, and draw my fees. It was easy money for me. Many of my readers may hesitate to believe that a hardened journalist can possess any conscience at all, yet it must be put upon record that I did quail for a short time at the prospect of examining a candidate for a Doctorate in the University of London upon a subject of which I knew almost nothing. Douglas Owen, an old friend of mine, must have laughed deep and long when he found himself junior to me as examiner for that Doctorate. I have been many different kinds of a fraud in my day, but never quite so swollen a fraud as I was then.

Now and then I have felt a mild regret that I was not able to eat dinners at the Inner Temple while I was

at Cambridge, and get myself called to the Bar. My most intimate friend did this, and I should probably have done it too had funds for my fees been available. About 1887 or so, at a time when the reading of handwriting for character and accomplishments was a popular amusement, I had my very illegible fist read. The verdict of the graphologist suggests that there may be a good deal in graphology. It read: "The writer of this specimen should take to the Bar or to journalism, or should combine these professions." I have, I submit, justified the journalism part of this verdict, and here is a story which indicates that I might have secured business at the Bar in my own specialities. About 1904 to 1905 I was offered a brief for an insurance case in the House of Lords, though I had never been called to the Bar. It was not, of course, the formal tender of a brief by a solicitor. What happened was this: An insurance company was fighting what it regarded as a highly important case which raised a new point concerning the allowance of income tax upon life assurance premiums. It had lost in the King's Bench and in the Appeal Court. The manager of the company was lamenting to me his difficulty in persuading learned counsel to make the technical points effectively, and then said: "If you will be one of our Counsel in the House of Lords and make our case plain to these darned K.C.'s we may win yet. I will speak to our solicitors about it." It was a flattering offer, which I was obliged to decline for the best possible of reasons. Perhaps if I had been a member of the Bar and appeared

in this case I might have abandoned journalism for law, though I expect not. Apart from the money side, which never appealed to me very strongly, editing newspapers must be much more entertaining than burning the midnight oil over dull briefs. Had politics attracted me then the temptation might have been severe, but as they never did my regrets at not being called were no more than surface pricks. A journalist is so much more powerful a personage outside Parliament than he is inside that he is usually a fool to attempt entry. An independent journalist of power and ability is courted by all parties ; the moment he becomes a private member he is of little use to any party or to his newspaper.

My life during those years of making good was not so strenuous as it may sound from the number of regular and irregular jobs which I undertook. About three-fifths of my income was drawn from *The Times* ; I was the editor of Bourne's Insurance Publications, which yielded little in cash yet much in the discipline of being compelled to analyse the figures of every insurance company ; I wrote for a while leaders for *The Daily Chronicle* when it was a penny paper under Fisher ; I contributed marine insurance notes by wire to a Liverpool paper until Moberly Bell found me out and ordered me to stop—he was an exacting monopolist ; and I had on my string some nine or ten weekly papers, magazines, and reviews with which from time to time I arranged special articles. In this category came the *Economist*, *National Review*, *Fortnightly*

and others. Meanwhile my partner, Bennet Copplestone, Esq., was writing two or three stories a year for *Cornhill* and about as many more for other magazines. I always took Saturday off—the precious Saturday of the newspaper man—and went a bicycling on the fine English roads which were so open and delightful until the multiplying motor cars made them unendurable. It was not until 1918 that I went back to a bicycle and then, with the motor cars swept away by the orders of Dora, enjoyed that most admirable of all means of human progression as much as in my distant youth.

We used to go off to a farm in the New Forest for a whole month in the summer, during which I earned nothing and had to provide for my regular work to be carried on. I don't suppose that any star performer ever enjoyed the efforts of his understudies less than I did the flounderings of mine in the marine insurance market. Working for six days a week—my Sundays were given up to fiction and to solid articles—during eleven months in the year I made £800 the first year 'outside,' and cleared between £800 and £1000 during each of the next two years. This remuneration may seem small to those who are paid fancy rates for articles or stories. My income was solidly earned by straightforward journalism, the greater part of it anonymous, and I was paid at the standard rates for specialist contributions. After allowing for the low prices and insignificant taxation of those days, I earned the equivalent of about £2000 a year now. When one reflects

that there was nothing speculative about my income—it was just as large as I had time and energy to make it—and that £30 was the highest sum I ever received for a single story, I must have touched the limit of what it was possible for a fully qualified journalist to earn at outside contributions in 1901-4. The market then for short stories and for fancy articles was not a tenth of what it is now, so that I had no temptation to turn aside from good old English joints and to take up with highly paid kickshaws.

Although the South African war had pushed up prices, and some years passed before they fell again, the cost of living in the early years of the century was no more than half what it is now. Direct and indirect taxation was so low that we did not worry about it—or rather, as always, only those who could best afford to pay income tax put up a shriek of ruin when a penny or two was clapped on. Mr. Joseph Chamberlain was ramping about the country telling the staple industries that they were being ruined, yet work was plentiful and almost everyone seemed to be well off. There was a powerful lot of spending about the old pound sterling. Take my annual holidays. Between 1900 and 1906 I went five times for a month to a farm in the New Forest situated in the most charming country about a mile and a half from the Solent and at about the same distance from Southampton Water. Those who have curiosity sufficient to plot out cross bearings upon a chart will find our farm near a village named Langley. There was a fine stone farmhouse with great lofty rooms.

We had our own quarters, and took our meals with the farmer and his daughter in the sumptuous style in which a good Devonshire farmer always lives however 'depressed' agriculture may be. For my farmer, who lived to the age of about 94, was Demshur bred sure-ly. At the beginning there were five of us, including two boys and a nurse. Later there were six. After including all expenses, travelling, petty cash, everything, our month in our New Forest farm used to cost me just £27. We paid for five only, as the baby 'did not count.' Twenty-seven pounds for all that crowd living in the best of quarters and upon the fat of the land. I don't suggest that my farm was an ordinary farm. It was a magic farm, and I should not disclose its paramount charms to the world to-day if my splendid old farmer and his most capable daughter were still in residence, and were prepared to take me in on the old terms. For years, in accordance with my abominable commercial instincts, I established a solid corner in that farm.

All through that period when I was nominally an outside contributor—it was actually rather less than three years—I was in the City office of *The Times* every day, except Saturday, and very often used to wander down to the Square, and mount that flight of wooden stairs which led to the ever open door of the manager's room. Moberly Bell's great head, with the eyes of challenge, used to thrust out round the corner of his desk, and rarely—unless he were very specially busy—would he order me to go away. I was

almost as closely in touch with what was going on in the Square during those years of reform—and of fantastic methods of raising money—as if I had never left. In some respects I was more closely in touch, for Moberly Bell, his savagery melted, bore himself towards me more as a father towards a son than as the manager of *The Times* to an outside contributor at so much a column of space. To the mass of his subordinates he was still ‘That Beast Bell,’ yet with me all his reserve had gone and he was the friend whom I loved. “He wos wery good to me, he wos,” as the guttersnipe Jo said of his friend in Dickens’ *Bleak House*. He would talk of his schemes and be patient with my criticism, for I could not quite reconcile myself then—and find it difficult to reconcile myself now—to the notion of the old *Times*, which stood for so much in the life of England, raising the wind to carry on by peddling reprints of an out-of-date edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. In Bell’s place I might have been driven to as pitiful a resource, yet in 1901, though not much later, *The Times* might have been saved by expedients less costly in prestige. I came to understand that in the circumstances of *The Times*, with its perilous constitution and its Walter printing business, Moberly Bell could not have done other than he did. He could not have superseded the constitution and abolished the printing business without the concurrence of the two Walters. He could not have reduced the price of the paper to a penny, and have put through all the reforms of business and

editorial management which were needed to make a price reduction effective in circulation, without a large sum in ready cash as working capital. And from whom was the working capital to come? Certainly not from the partners in the ownership of the copyright.

CHAPTER X

MOBERLY BELL RAISES THE WIND

THOSE who have followed me thus far will be able to examine in a sympathetic spirit Moberly Bell's expedients to raise the wind whereby *The Times* might be clawed off the financial rocks which so gravely threatened it. When he first became assistant manager to Mr. Walter he was called upon to deal with a Printing House Square shattered by the typhoon of the Parnell Commission. Before he had cleared off the accumulated costs, and liabilities arising out of those costs, the declining circulation and the increasing expenses of carrying on brought with them a series of new apprehensions. He had all through to find the rent for the buildings, which were the property of the Walters, and to meet the charges for printing the paper which became due to the Walter printing business. The obligations for rent and printing were first charges which skimmed the cream off Moberly Bell's revenue. Those who blame Moberly Bell—and many blamed him at a time when he could offer no defence—for turning to adventitious sources of revenue, must please bear in mind that if he had not raised the wind somehow *The Times* could

scarcely have survived the nineteenth century. From the purely financial point of view, having regard to revenue and costs of carrying on, the newspaper was in a worse position in the later 'nineties than it was at the time when it was purchased by the Northcliffe interests. Though in 1907 *The Times* was ordered by the Court of Chancery to be sold, it was not then insolvent. It had become horribly involved with the Book Club and, if it had not been sold, must have been reconstituted so that it could raise working capital and obtain possession of its own printing department. But the actual liabilities, apart from the Book Club, were not large. Ten years earlier, in 1897, it had become more than doubtful whether *The Times* under its outworn constitution would survive the century. In these desperate circumstances Moberly Bell entered into his heroic partnership with Messrs. Hooper and Jackson, a firm of American book agents, who were destined to dominate for ten years the fortunes of the proudest newspaper in the world.

Horace Hooper and W. M. Jackson had purchased from Messrs. A. and C. Black the copyright and moulds of the ninth edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. It had been a famous edition, produced between the years 1875 and 1889, the work of high authorities in their several subjects. Hooper and Jackson had devised a scheme for reprinting this edition and for selling it on the instalment system to the British and American public. They had a *flair* for book selling, and perceived the high value of associating with

themselves the name and publicity machinery of a daily newspaper such as *The Times* was. I do not know how Horace Hooper first got into contact with Bell—it was probably not difficult, for Moberly Bell was personally very accessible and always attentive to any new projects which might add to his depleted revenue. It used to be rumoured that Hooper had hawked the *Encyclopædia* round London before he caught the ear of Bell, but this story I do not believe. Hooper himself told me that *The Times* was in his eye when he purchased the ninth edition from Messrs. Black, and that he worried Bell persistently until he had wrung from him a rather grudging consent to try the experiment of a *Times* issue. Bell had just produced a *Times* atlas and had made a substantial success of it. He was in the mood for further experiments, and Hooper caught him, as it were, on the psychological hop.

I believe that I am correct in saying that from the first Mr. Walter, the governing proprietor, was opposed to the Hooper and Jackson connection. Neither Horace Hooper nor W. M. Jackson, Americans of the business class, could appeal to the product of Eton, Christ Church, and Bear Wood in the county of Berks. Mr. Walter's instinct warned him that little of good, except perhaps a quantity of crude cash, could spring from a combination of *The Times* and an American-owned business of bookselling. Yet when Bell, as he was bound to do, represented that it was a choice between Hooper and Jackson and reconstruction,

Mr. Walter accepted the Americans. For Moberly Bell it was at the beginning a forlorn adventure. He did not accept Horace Hooper's estimates of the spoils which would accrue to *The Times* from its sponsorship of a reprint of the rather aged ninth edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Yet to Bell in his straits even a few thousand pounds were highly welcome, and he was fairly sure of realising a few thousands. He began by authorising the reprint of a mere 800 sets. When, as it turned out, the *Encyclopædia*, and all that grew out of it, revealed itself as a little gold mine, the influence of Horace Hooper over Moberly Bell, and through him over Mr. Walter, became paramount. The very existence of *The Times* became bound up with Hooper's prodigious volumes in their oaken bookcases, with his *Times* system of annual instalments, and with his riotous advertisements.

Moberly Bell was a big man who never did anything in a small way. Having once accepted the necessity of the Hooper and Jackson partnership, he put all his might into it, and supported it before the world and against the world. Even with me, an adverse though understanding critic, he never adopted a note of apologetics. In private talk with me he has over and over again defended the American bookselling with which *The Times* had become identified, as if it were not only defensible in itself but invulnerable in itself. He would go so far as to maintain that the development of *The Times* into a bookselling agency was the latest word in newspaper enterprise. He would laugh at me

as a back number when I contended that the correct, and only permanent, solution of the financial difficulties of *The Times* was to make the newspaper in itself worthy of the support of subscribers and of advertisers. I had no faith in the permanence of a daily newspaper which required to be propped up on volumes of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, the *Century Dictionary* and *Fifty Years of Punch*. "My dear Kitchin," Bell would reply, "have you not discovered that the better a newspaper is the fewer people there are to buy it? The more we improve *The Times* the smaller grows the number of those who buy and read it. It has become too good for the ordinary public. If *The Times*, in the interests of the country, is to carry on it must be subsidised." He regarded the Hooper and Jackson book-selling business as a subsidy, a providential subsidy, which enabled *The Times* to remain true to the splendid old traditions which had been of so much service to England. After a few years of the Hooper and Jackson connection, Bell had convinced himself that he was doing two great patriotic deeds: first by keeping *The Times* alive, and, secondly, by providing the English-speaking world with the best encyclopædia in the language. And yet, though he had grown well assured both of the purity of his own motives and of the national value of his work, his sense of humour remained unimpaired. He could still laugh at the absurdities of the old *Times*, and revel in the playful skits of C. L. Graves and E. V. Lucas on the 'Inside Brit.' I am sure that he enjoyed *Wisdom While You Wait* all the

more keenly because he saw what first-rate advertising matter it was for the *Encyclopædia*, from which *The Times* drew so many shillings per set sold.

I am convinced that Moberly Bell was not humbugging himself. He was genuinely convinced of the patriotic merit of the double course upon which he had entered. No man had a keener nose for humbug. From time to time he would receive letters from impossible critics who objected to the appearance of advertisements in the news pages of *The Times*—display advertisements. One of the most persistent critics was the late Professor Lecky, the historian. Verbally and by letter Lecky would protest against the contamination of grave news by printing in contiguous columns descriptions of ladies' underclothing. No matter how discreetly these drapers' advertisements might be worded, they manifestly, according to Lecky, referred to unmentionable articles of raiment. For a while Bell bore with Lecky's assertions that readers of *The Times* would willingly pay a shilling a copy for a paper stripped of these display ads. Conceive then the joy of Moberly Bell when one day he learned, quite by accident, that Lecky the purist, the man who asserted that other folk would willingly pay a shilling a copy for an uncontaminated *Times*, that Lecky did not even pay threepence for his own copy of *The Times*. He shared the paper with a friend and paid three halfpence only. After this shocking discovery, and the assault from Bell which followed upon it, Lecky's willowy figure bent as a tender lily bends before the chilly blasts

of autumn. In the scornful presence of Moberly Bell he could not hold up his head again.

The 23rd of March, 1898, is an important date in my story. It saw the first of the announcements that *The Times* was about to reprint the ninth edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* and offer it in twenty-five volumes at £14 for the lot. A first instalment of one guinea would bring the whole set clattering upon one's doorstep. The original advertisements were sedate in tone and in type. It was not until *The Times* issues of the *Encyclopædia* had become a tremendous success in bookselling by instalments that the tone and type both warmed up, and we enjoyed those exhilarating exhibitions in the art of American advertising which brightened the life of London. The announcement of March 23, 1898—a full page in *The Times*—was most carefully drawn. Moberly Bell saw to that. It was explained that this ninth edition, which *The Times* was about to reprint, was identically the same edition as that which Messrs. A. and C. Black had produced between the years 1875 and 1889. It was not a new edition but a reprint of the latest existing edition, and was offered at two-fifths of the original retail price. In all the leaflets and other advertising matter, with which Messrs. Hooper and Jackson followed up the preliminary announcement, these facts were clearly emphasised. There is no justification, and never was from the first any justification, for the charge that *The Times* deceived its readers into the belief that its reprint of the ninth edition was in fact a new edition of the *Encyclopædia*

brought up to date. Later on, this charge was freely made. There was no substance in it. What happened, of course, was that in the delirium of the great boom worked up so deftly by Messrs. Hooper and Jackson, many men and women subscribed for the ninth edition without reading the advertisements or leaflets. That is quite a common experience. Those who are intent upon criticising a newspaper very frequently refrain in their haste from reading what they desire to criticise. Over and over again, as an editor, I have had violent complaints that I have omitted this or inserted that, when a perusal of my paper showed clearly that I had neither omitted this nor inserted that. I had often done exactly what the complainant alleged that I had not done. So it was with the Hooper and Jackson advertisements. They were most carefully scrutinised by Moberly Bell, and they asserted nothing as a fact which was not a fact. Nevertheless, charges of deception were made against *The Times*, and one may suppose will continue to be made whenever this episode in its history is carelessly related.

Messrs. Hooper and Jackson had purchased from Messrs. Black the copyright and moulds of the ninth edition. They made plates from these moulds in any quantity called for by a clamorous public, and they produced sets of the *Encyclopædia* at an extremely small cost. The price of £14 for twenty-five large volumes does not sound high, yet it left a very handsome margin of profit from which Moberly Bell drew on behalf of *The Times* a generous percentage. Ten thousand sets

were sold within a year in the United Kingdom, and the whole sale of the British reprint in the Mother Country and the Empire exceeded 33,000 sets. I am free to give these figures because they were announced in 1903 by Hugh Chisholm, the editor of the tenth and eleventh editions of the 'E.B.,' as everyone called it at Printing House Square. They are figures which indicate roughly how rich was the cake from which *The Times* enjoyed the privilege of cutting a handsome wedge. But that was not all; it was no more than a beginning. Hooper and Jackson soon showed what they could do after they had successfully taken the first step which counts.

In March 1899 came a further announcement that, the reprint of the ninth edition having been so well received, *The Times* would at once put in hand the preparation of a tenth edition, to consist of the twenty-five volumes of the ninth and about ten further supplementary volumes designed to bring the information in the ninth up to date. The editors of these supplementary volumes were to be Sir Donald Mackenzie Wallace (foreign editor of *The Times*) and Dr. Hadley, President of Yale University. Wallace's principal assistant was Hugh Chisholm, who succeeded him as editor in 1900. The announcement of Dr. Hadley's name as co-editor emphasised the importance of what may be called the American end of the whole *Encyclopædia* project of Hooper and Jackson. The British end was by comparison insignificant. Yet it served the immensely valuable purpose—to Hooper

and Jackson—of uniting the name of *The Times* to a standard British work, and of so commending it in American eyes as an authoritative production of British scholarship. The number sold in the United States of all editions was more than ten times greater than the British sales, and it was a sale in which *The Times* did not financially participate. Messrs. Hooper and Jackson could well afford to pay *The Times* very handsome terms for the use of its name, seeing that Printing House Square drew commission only on the British sales and not on the much greater American sales.

With the projection of the tenth edition—the supplementary volumes—Moberly Bell entered upon a new stage in his career as a seller of books on behalf of *The Times*. In so far as the ninth edition had been concerned, he merely acted as agent. The contents were exactly as they had been prepared years before under the supervision of Messrs. A. and C. Black. He had been responsible for the advertisements in which the name of *The Times* had been employed, and for which *The Times* was paid in respect of all which appeared in its own columns. He was paid the agreed commission on sales of the British reprint. But now, in respect of this tenth edition it was necessary for Printing House Square to assume a fresh responsibility which had not, I fancy, been contemplated at the beginning. The success of the reprint and of the instalment system—which yielded astonishingly few bad debts at any time—had made a new edition essential if that success were to be exploited to the full as

both Bell and Hooper and Jackson were now most eager to exploit it. So Moberly Bell cast himself for the part of parent of a new *Encyclopædia* and committed *The Times* to full editorial responsibility towards it. The arrangement reached between Moberly Bell and Horace Hooper was one which could not have been worked unless there had been the utmost good faith on both sides. Moberly Bell assumed untrammelled control over the editorial part of the new volumes; the editor and staff nominated, or approved, by him were not to be interfered with by Hooper and Jackson. They were to select such writers as they thought fit, and all the expenses which they incurred were to be repaid by Hooper and Jackson without question. The business side, including the payment of all costs of every description, was left to Hooper and Jackson. This arrangement must have worked well for I have never heard either Bell or Hooper speak a word against it. The editorial staff of the *Encyclopædia* were a *Times* staff, appointed and paid in the first instance by Moberly Bell, just as he appointed and paid the staff of *The Times* itself. Each month an account was sent to Hooper and Jackson of the costs incurred on behalf of the 'E.B.' by *The Times*, and they at once sent a cheque in repayment. When I was assistant manager all this business passed through my hands, and no account submitted by me on behalf of the 'E.B.' was delayed for a day in settlement. The editor and staff of the *Encyclopædia* were actually housed in Printing House Square itself, and remained there until

after the purchase by Lord Northcliffe and the final settling up with Hooper and Jackson. Hugh Chisholm, acting on behalf of *The Times* as editor of the 'E.B.,' was supreme in his own department, and no one has ever challenged the independence and the quality of the many volumes of the 'E.B.' produced under his guidance. When his eleventh edition was brought out under the auspices of the Cambridge University Press in 1911 the syndics of that press took every precaution beforehand to 'vet' Chisholm's work and to satisfy themselves that the *Encyclopædia* was in all editorial respects worthy of their imprint. This test, which was, I have been assured, begun in a spirit of some prejudice, ended in the full acceptance of the *Encyclopædia* as the best work of its kind in existence. It will thus be manifest that Moberly Bell, when he accepted editorial responsibility on behalf of *The Times* for the tenth and eleventh editions of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, abated nothing in the way of precautions which would ensure the completed work being worthy of its sponsors. And much credit must be given to that queer mixture of sentiment and business acumen—Horace Hooper—for the good faith which he displayed all through in return for the trust which Moberly Bell so unreservedly placed in him.

In 1899 the preparation of the supplementary volumes was begun—there were to be nine of text and one of index—the sale of the ninth edition reprint was stopped in the United Kingdom yet went on merrily in the Dominions and Colonies, and the interval

before the tenth edition could renew the stream of 'E.B.' gold was occupied in minor shows, all of which yielded profit to Hooper and Jackson and handsome commissions to *The Times*. By this time Moberly Bell had become as keen an enthusiast for selling books on the instalment system as was Hooper who had introduced him to the game. In 1900 came *The Times* reprint of the *First Fifty Years of Punch*, and in 1901 and 1902 a copious flow of sets of *The Century Dictionary*.

CHAPTER XI

HORACE HOOPER OF THE 'E.B.'

WHILE all this was going on under the auspices of *The Times*, and while Hugh Chisholm and his gallant men were busily at work on the top floor of Printing House Square forging new weapons for Moberly Bell's fight for the life of *The Times*, let us turn aside and consider what manner of man was this American Horace Hooper who obtained and maintained for ten years a paramount influence over Moberly Bell and over the destinies of *The Times*. He succeeded by Success; he brought a rare and refreshing stream of treasure to Printing House Square at a time when it was perishing of financial inanition. It is written that nothing succeeds like success and nothing fails like failure. Horace Hooper's success was prodigious—his firm must have gathered in from the American and British editions of the 'E.B.' ten times as much as *The Times* got out of the British editions—and his failure was no less notorious than his previous success. For the Book Club was as resounding a failure as the 'E.B.' was a success, and though the financial loss of it was probably a fleabite to Hooper and Jackson, the



Photo, by Marcian

HORACE HOOPER

discredit of its quarrel with the publishers and booksellers was the last big push which brought *The Times* to the disaster of 1908.

I myself knew Horace Hooper fairly well. I met him frequently between 1904 and 1908 under circumstances of rapid and eventful change. I heard a vast amount about him from Moberly Bell. I have known several of those employed by him on the business side of the *Encyclopædia*, and I have met others who have seen aspects of his many faceted character which were hidden from me. After giving full weight to direct and indirect evidence concerning him and his ways, I have no good cause for modifying my own personal judgment derived from personal experience. My habit is to judge men as I find them myself; one's own experiences are at least first-hand evidence, the experiences of others are second-hand and inadmissible. Nevertheless, while sticking firmly to my own opinion that Hooper was essentially a straight man, I will give something of the experiences of others, however much they may conflict with my own. I have been assured by those who have tried the experiment that it was every bit as difficult to tie up Hooper in the bonds of a legal agreement as it is to lash an eel with oiled string. On the other hand, I have the word of two of my friends, both of whom worked with Hooper for years and one of whom travelled over the world on his business, that they never had a line of written agreement with Hooper and that the fairness, even the generosity, with which he treated them was beyond praise. Think what it

means to go about the world selling a book like the 'E.B.' and never to have one's expense accounts even scrutinised—accounts which included one's wife's expenses as well as one's own. Then there is the experience of Moberly Bell which I have recounted above, and my own when I took over much of the details of management from Moberly Bell. I never asked Bell if he had an agreement with Hooper in legal form because I am quite sure that he had not. Moberly Bell's practice was to discuss the terms of an understanding and then, after an agreement had been reached, to embody the outline of it in a letter. I have seen a letter from Bell to Hooper in which, within the limits of a single sheet of notepaper, the terms of the Book Club contract were set forth. In about two dozen lines Bell expressed an understanding for which a lawyer would have required as many folios. And there was this difference, a most important difference. Bell's few lines bound Hooper in spirit to an honourable understanding; the lawyer's folios, which left nothing to honour, would, I feel sure, have failed to confine Hooper within their toils.

He was, I believe, one of those men who have a high sense of honour when they are trusted, and very little, if any, sense of honour when they are distrusted. A man of this type is the despair of lawyers because they cannot understand him; but those who do understand him, and treat him as he wishes to be treated, receive from him faith and generosity. Moberly Bell, no mean judge, sized up Horace Hooper from the first.

He was a ranker who loved to be accepted as a gentleman. Treat him as a gentleman and one had no trouble with him; treat him as an essentially dishonest ranker and one got all the trouble that there was to get. I was never surprised to hear, as I often did, that Hooper in the treatment of his business staff had gone far beyond in generosity and consideration what might have been expected. He loved to show himself generous and considerate. His appearance was not prepossessing; one felt at first hostile and exceedingly cautious, yet somehow the man grew upon one until he managed to inspire a sentiment which approached affection. Moberly Bell was much attached to him, and Hooper, I am sure, was deeply attached to Bell. He thought all the world of *The Times*, and with good reason, for the prestige of *The Times* had made his fortune. But he would not listen to a suggestion that the 'E.B.' connection was in any way derogatory to *The Times*. Both *The Times* and the 'E.B.' were, according to Hooper, the last word in English scholarship. As a man almost totally uneducated, he revered English scholarship, and bore himself humbly towards it. He would no more have ventured to interfere with the editing of the 'E.B.' than he would with the editing of *The Times* itself.

My own relations with Horace Hooper became most friendly. He was pleased to form from the first a high opinion of me, and was constantly cracking me up to Moberly Bell. This was extremely useful to me, for Moberly Bell used to profess the greatest respect

for Hooper's opinion of men and things. I am quite sure that if Hooper had not been in his relations with Bell a very straight man the connection between Hooper and Jackson and *The Times* would not have expanded as it did into the firmest of bonds. Many men who knew Bell slightly and Hooper slightly wrote them down as fellow crooks, and wondered how *The Times* could put up with either of them. But I, who knew them both well, did not take this view. What is more important, Lord Northcliffe did not take it either, and he was not a judge to be despised in the days of his prime.

Hooper was fond of doing little unexpected kindnesses. His firm brought out a work called *The Historians' History*, and as I was always deeply interested in history I subscribed to it and paid my first instalment. The volumes in the inevitable oaken bookcase duly arrived. About a week later I had a letter from Hooper reproaching me for not asking him to send me a set. He enclosed a receipt in full, returned my guinea, and added that had he learned of my wishes earlier he would have sent the morocco bound set instead of the one in cloth which I had ordered and received. Years later, when the eleventh edition was published, a set was despatched in the ordinary course to my paper, *The Glasgow Herald*. At the same time Hooper wrote and offered for my personal use the India paper edition in thin morocco bindings. It may have been good business to have done both these things, though I did not regard his action in that light.

If I had to sum up Horace Hooper I should say that he was, like so many of his fellow countrymen, a compost of idealism, generosity, and commercial acumen, a man who was most easy to get on with so long as one did not try to tie him down with legal tape. For those who did he must have been a perfect terror. I fancy that the syndics of the Cambridge University Press were thankful to see the last of him. His course in life was strewn with law suits, and the firm of Hooper and Jackson was finally dissolved in a whirlpool of suits and cross suits which must have gratified Hooper as much as they did the lawyers engaged upon both sides.

Although Horace Hooper had gained the confidence of Moberly Bell by the success of his sale of the reprinted ninth edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, he did not exercise a dominating influence over the councils of Printing House Square until the end of 1903. Until then he had been the head of a book-selling adjunct of *The Times*; from 1904 onwards he was the wizard who was credited with the power of compelling circulation and advertisements for *The Times* itself. It was Hooper's victorious campaign of 1902-3 in selling the tenth edition of the 'E.B.' which convinced Moberly Bell of his commanding ability to restore the sales of *The Times*. It was certainly a remarkable campaign, and as a feat of psychological generalship possibly unsurpassed in the history of advertising. It was a campaign which exactly illustrated Hooper's knowledge of men, and

his capacity to bend them to his will. He had a good book to sell, and he revealed a flair for selling it which amounted to genius. London and England and Lord Salisbury's Celtic Fringes were taken by storm.

The campaign opened in November 1902 with a dinner to celebrate the completion of the tenth edition—the ten supplementary volumes which had been the work of Hugh Chisholm and his staff. It was a dinner of which the list of guests read like that at a Lord Mayor's Banquet. The great ones of the earth met together to sing the praises of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Very few indeed among them can have realised that when they attended a dinner given ostensibly by *The Times* they were in fact the guests of Horace Hooper, the puppets of Horace Hooper, and that they were piping to a tune composed for them by Horace Hooper. The part assigned to the guests at this dinner was to satisfy prospective purchasers of the tenth edition that it was in all respects worthy of their instalments, and the guests performed their part exactly as it had been assigned to them.

Early in 1903 the campaign proper opened with an offer of scholarships and prizes by *The Times* to students of general information. The scholarships and prizes were of considerable value, and appealed directly both to students and to their parents. The announcements were deftly drawn; they did not blatantly assert that only by means of the fat volumes of the tenth edition of the 'E.B.' these rewards of general information could be attained, yet the inference leaped to the eye.

What Hooper wanted was enquiries from parents and guardians all over the country, and he got what he wanted. The cost of the scholarships and prizes, though it ran into several thousands of pounds, was small in comparison with the value of the enquiries. That was the purpose of all Hooper's preliminary advertising: to get the names of enquirers who, by an intensive system of 'follow up' extending over months and culminating in a series of 'last days,' might at the end be landed as purchasers.

Publication of the tenth edition, consisting of thirty-five volumes, began in April 1903. There were twenty-five volumes of the old ninth edition and ten supplementary volumes, the total price being £28, payable by instalments on the system which by this time had become associated with the name of *The Times*. There was no attempt made in the early stages to get more than enquiries for the illustrated descriptive 'booklet' which Hooper and Jackson were prepared to broadcast in any quantity. But once his name and address had been secured, every enquirer was assiduously followed up wherever he might take refuge. Advertisements shouted at him from the columns of newspapers published in the remotest parts of England and Wales, Scotland and Ireland; leaflets and letters poured in upon him. Flight was useless; the whole country from Land's End to John o' Groats and from Yarmouth to Dunmore Head was pervaded by the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. It loaded the British breakfast table with the morning coffee, and lay, hard

and knobbly, under British pillows throughout uneasy nights. There was no escape from the torrent of 'follow ups' save by the despatch of a firm order to purchase accompanied by an instalment of one guinea. And then arose a new problem: how to accommodate the thirty-five volumes in the oaken bookcase which blocked up the minute halls of suburban villas.

It was a tremendous campaign which culminated in the 'last days' of December. Twenty-one years have passed, yet I remember as if it were the December of 1924 instead of the December of 1903, that series of Going—Going—Gone! advertisements which ended with a last resounding Bang! of the auctioneer's hammer on December the eighteenth. The plight of enquirers, who had not yet taken refuge in a firm order, was lamentable. Telegrams—reply paid—poured upon them daily. Urgent letters, couched in tones of the most friendly remonstrance, arrived by every post. Wives, though they might be hard put to it to pay for food and clothing, implored their husbands "not to let this opportunity slip." After December the Eighteenth It Would Not Occur Again! Husbands, whose bank accounts might be already overdrawn, wrote cheques for the preliminary guinea, and felt that they had come into a fortune. All classes had become infected by the Hooper bacillus, more virulent than the bacillus of influenza. Few, once they had committed their names as enquirers to the inexorable organisation of Hooper and Jackson, were permitted to wriggle out of their all pervasive net. It

was on one of the 'last days' of December 1903 that Hooper achieved the crowning triumph of his dazzling career. He received a telegram—one of his own reply-pays—requesting that a set of the tenth edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* be reserved in the name of Alfred Harmsworth! "Got him!" cried Hooper, and instantly composed a 'Nunc Dimittis.' If his system of follow-ups and last days could catch the great Alfred Harmsworth himself, it had justified all the pains which he had lavished upon it.

Upon this famous last day, of December 18, 1903, Hugh Chisholm wrote in *The Times* that the sales of the tenth edition had yielded more than £600,000. And there was much more to follow. For though the sale in the United Kingdom ceased upon that day, the produce of the last days had still to be gathered in and the Dominions and Colonies had still to be fully exploited. In the United States, according to Hooper, the sales were stupendous—but since *The Times* did not participate in them they stand outside my story.

After the close of 1903 the stock of Hooper and Jackson was at its highest premium in Printing House Square. The *Encyclopædia* project, which had begun in 1898 with the printing of a poor eight hundred sets, had in five years saved *The Times* from the disasters which beset it in the 'nineties, and yielded resources which could be employed in re-establishing the paper in the favour of the English public. That was, as always, Moberly Bell's first thought. He cared little

for the financial success of the 'E.B.' except as a means of clearing off the liabilities of *The Times*, and of giving him means to improve *The Times* and to restore its old position as the first of London's daily newspapers. He had not yet become convinced—as he did later—that *The Times* must be subsidised by outside methods of attraction if it were to continue upon its old traditional lines. To this conviction he did come after the comparative failure of the circulation scheme of 1904, upon which he had now determined to embark. It was a scheme to lower the price to annual subscribers and at the same time to give all purchasers of *The Times* better value for their money. He had reached the conclusion that a newspaper published at threepence daily could not compete with good newspapers published at one penny unless it were made manifestly worth the higher price charged for it. He was prepared now to throw his full weight on the side of the reformers, who had been doing their utmost for some years past within the financial limits imposed upon them. I have no occasion to complain of this decision of his, because it was upon the rising wave of reform that I returned to Printing House Square for my second and concluding period of service within its red brick walls.

CHAPTER XII

PRINTING HOUSE SQUARE: MY SECOND PERIOD

It was a whimsy of Tenniel to represent *The Times* in his cartoons as an elderly woman clad in voluminous skirts and bearing upon her head an immense poke bonnet of Mid-Victorian design. In her hand was an umbrella of Gamp dimensions. Somehow this figure rises up before me when I think of the old *Times* in the process of being reformed. It is scarcely possible, one learns, even with thyroid gland taken from monkeys, to make an old man young, and it would seem to be almost as difficult an operation to make an old newspaper young. *The Times*, since the period of which I now write, has suffered two severe surgical operations: the first in 1908, the second in 1923. The first operation may have resulted in a sort of youth but it was not the youth of *The Times*. The skittish female who pranced before the world during the later years of the Northcliffe era had shortened her skirts and shed her poke bonnet—maybe, she had also bobbed her grey hair—and carried *The Times* label, yet she was barely to be

recognised as the old lady rejuvenated. The splendid virtues of the old *Times*, which it never lost during the years of which I have written, and have still to write, had faded in the transference of body from revered age to the semblance of youth. The second operation, in 1923, from which *The Times* has happily recovered, really seems to have been successful in regrafting the old traditions, which count for everything in English journalism, upon a body with red blood in its veins. I should, if it were permitted to me, draw the new *Times* of to-day as a gracious lady who has known life as it is, with all its sweets and its bitternesses, and yet is able to smile tenderly upon life. I should draw her as one surrounded by a crowd of clamorous noisy 'flappers' among whom she is able to move with gentle tolerance because she is sure that they will become less noisy, and less flighty, when they find time to grow up a little.

There is nothing quite so vulnerable as a daily newspaper. The greatest net sale of to-day may be a tombstone in Fleet Street twenty or thirty years hence. But though newspapers may come and go in the future as in the past, there is in the best of British journalism, if it rest but true to itself, a moral quality which is imperishable. The tradition of strict impartiality in the collection and selection of News, and of accuracy in presentation, which has survived unimpaired in the best of our Press, and has been revived in the new *Times* of to-day, cannot perish through lack of support from the British people. If ever there were a people who

have remained obstinately true to type, who are in all fundamentals the same people in the Twentieth Century as their fathers were in the Eighteenth or the Sixteenth, it is the people who inhabit Great Britain. They will always value News which is real News honestly seeking for Truth as its basis, however much they may divert their leisure with 'news' which at its best is trivial and at its worst is noisome propaganda.

The editorial reforms in *The Times* may be said to have begun with the establishment of the 'Literary Supplement' in 1902. I am not going to relate the surprising history of the 'Literary Supplement' during the twenty-two years of its career. That story belongs to another man to tell or to withhold as he pleases. I am concerned merely with its early years. The 'Literary Supplement'—now the most widely read and most valued publication of its *genre* in the English language—was started, as so many things are started in England, as a temporary expedient to get over a temporary difficulty. In my early days the galley proofs of book reviews, facetiously labelled 'Books of the Week,' used to accumulate in the hands of Hamilton Fyfe, and become mildewed and moth-eaten by the evening when, after long delays, they found harbourage in the Outer Sheet. *Literature*, a separate weekly paper, had been founded by *The Times* and had failed. Though the existence of *Literature* did not relieve *The Times* of its responsibilities towards those who sought in its columns for news and opinions upon current books, yet it served as an excuse for the grudging allowance of space in the

paper conceded to Books. While Parliament, that voracious eater up of space, was sitting, books accumulated unnoticed; when Parliament rose there was a gaol delivery, and the Outer Sheet bulged with reviews. This happy-go-lucky system satisfied no one: not authors, nor readers, nor publishers. Least of all did it satisfy the miserable man whose duty it was to look after books, to arrange for reviews, and then to fight an unending battle for space in which to do justice to them. It was Bruce Richmond, then an Assistant Editor, who persuaded Buckle and Moberly Bell to run a weekly literary supplement while Parliament was sitting in order to keep pace with the flow of books. So the Supplement began temporarily, almost casually, in the same form as one sees to-day. In a very short time all pretence that it was to be temporary during the Session was abandoned. The public who were interested in literature leaped at the Supplement, so that within quite a few weeks it was as conspicuous a success as the unlamented *Literature* had been a failure. Richmond—with F. T. Dalton as his assistant—was associated with it from the first issue, and ran it for ten years in the scraps of time which he snatched from his very arduous duties in the Editor's Room as Deputy High Priest of the gospel of Accuracy to J. B. Capper. The 'Literary Supplement' was then, and for many years after, a true supplement to *The Times*; it was included (free) with an issue of *The Times* each week, and was not published separately with a separate price as at present. Richmond ran the book reviews upon a principle—the one sound

principle—which I stole from him and adopted as my own when I went to Glasgow. This principle was to fit the book to the reviewer and not the reviewer to the book. Important books were reviewed by men who had studied the subject with which the book dealt; less important books were allotted in so far as was practicable upon the same system. Hence one got those very rare articles in journalism, reviews of books which were themselves contributions to the common stock of literature. If Richmond had done nothing else than conduct upon his own sound principle the 'Literary Supplement' from 1902 until this day, he would have merited a statue in, say, the vicinity of Covent Garden to be paid for by the pennies of poor authors, publishers, and readers whom he has befriended. He did much more. He was a gallant knight who again and again rescued Little Red Riding Hood from the Wicked Wolf which lusted for her innocent blood. But that is his story; not mine.

Just as no General can plan a campaign by himself, so no Editor can conduct a paper by himself. Both Chiefs need the services of a trained Staff, selected by themselves or approved by themselves. Bruce Richmond's outstanding service to *The Times*—apart from the 'Literary Supplement'—was his flair for suggesting to the Editor exactly the right men for the important posts which became vacant, or for the new posts which were created during this period of energetic reform. Moberly Bell, who had been for a while picking up gold in an American Tom Tiddler's Ground,

slackened his taut purse strings. On the Foreign side Valentine Chirol had an eye for the right man in the right place which resembled Richmond's and was equally valuable. Every editor, if he is to be any good at all, must be able to select square men for square holes and round men for round holes. I am not myself wholly deficient in this art of fitting the job to the man and not the man to the job. There are men working now in positions of responsibility in *The Times* and in *The Glasgow Herald* whom I discovered and brought in, or whom I found fidgeting uneasily in square holes until I plucked them forth and stuck them into the round holes which they had been born to fit. The art of selecting men is the mark of an editor, as it is the mark of every successful manager of any business or of any successful general or admiral. Richmond's almost infallible eye for the right man is seen in every week's issue of the 'Literary Supplement'; in the bigger world of *The Times* itself it was to be seen no less conspicuously. Quite a number of those writers who, by their sheer personal distinction and outstanding merit, have broken through the anonymity of their contributions were suggested by Richmond while he was Assistant Editor. A. B. Walkley was known to be the dramatic correspondent of *The Times* long before any of his articles were signed 'A. B. W.' Bernard Darwin has for quite twenty years made reports of golf meetings and articles upon Golf a delight to the humble player, and a joy to the man who can recognise first-class writing when

he sees it. Darwin can not only make a golf championship an occasion for literature—without loss in accuracy as a golf report—but can write of himself as a competitor in a bland third person which is what American women call ‘a perfect scream.’ His description of himself once, in the semi-final of an amateur championship, as a “frightened tired old man” won all hearts to him. Though his articles are rarely, if ever, signed, every golfer knows that Bernard Darwin is *The Times* correspondent, and all distinguish Darwin’s work from that of his colleagues, however good in its own fashion that other work may be.

Then there was Clutton-Brock, whose articles on Gardening I pounced upon when I exercised authority in the Square and issued in a slim green volume. Clutton-Brock could write about many other subjects besides Gardening, and always with his own unmistakable stamp. There was Harold Child, too, both in the ‘Literary Supplement’ and in *The Times*, who brought a new atmosphere into the arid desert of the leader columns of my first period in the ‘nineties. On the side of Sport, in addition to artists like Darwin there were first-class experts who knew the sports about which they wrote, and could write in distinguished manner about them. There was Noel, a Champion at racquets, and almost a Champion at real Tennis, who not only wrote upon his own games but conducted, under the supervision of Richmond, the whole of the Sport pages. When Polo burst suddenly into popular favour the right man, Captain Creed, was again found

to deal with it as it should be dealt with in a newspaper like *The Times*.

On the Imperial and Foreign News side—always in my time called ‘Latest’ and, I expect, still called ‘Latest’ because for half a century or more the Foreign News page was headed ‘Latest Intelligence’—on the side of Imperial and Foreign News the reforming hand of Chirol was seen at work. I had no responsibility for money in those early years of this Century, and do not know what was then spent upon ‘Latest,’ yet I should gravely doubt if the costs of the good stuff then were heavier than the costs of the dull stuff of earlier years. Morrison of Peking, though his name never appeared attached to his articles, was known to all the world as Morrison of *The Times*. He was one, too, whose personality could not be covered up by any veil of anonymity. Yet another was Repington, the Military Correspondent who made his name by his articles on the Russo-Japanese War. Lionel James, the principal War Correspondent of *The Times*, with his letters from China and his hazardous enterprise of a wireless ship in the Yellow Sea, established a reputation which proved that a war correspondent, who is but big enough, has no need for his name to be attached to his articles. James used to tell how he received by wireless from both belligerents messages that they were out after him, and would hang him on capture. Under the system of general anonymity only the very best men, who deserve to be known by name, compel their names to be known by the quality of their work. I am perhaps old-fashioned

in still believing that anonymous journalism exercises a far more potent influence in the public mind than any collection of signed articles. The present-day practice of signing has gone so far that one sees a newspaper sprinkled with names little more impressive than those of the directors, photographers, and title writers which precede the display of an American 'Drammer' at the picture houses.

In *The Times* of the 'nineties there was a lack of that distinctive personal note which is of the essence of literature, whether it takes the form of a book or of a piece of first-class journalism. That lack has been made good, and I now write of a period of reform in which the personal note was sounded in a fashion most unmistakeable. The anonymity of contributors in the columns of *The Times* remains as rigid as ever, but once readers become attracted by a man's distinctive work—articles, letters, even sometimes leaders—they quickly make it their business to find out who he is and what manner of man he is. That is the test of the really valuable personal note, whether its richness of *timbre* can clearly penetrate the buzz of the crowd. In all these reforms, and they were great reforms, though I have mentioned more especially Richmond and Chisolm, it must always be remembered that if an Editor be held responsible for what is lacking in a newspaper, he must also be given full credit for what of good it contains. I do not think that Buckle would claim to have been the originator of all these reforms, but to him belongs the great credit of instantly perceiving and

adopting a good thing when he saw it. Once he was convinced that an appointment was good he supported his new man for all that he was worth; as soon as he was convinced that a new method of treatment was better than the old method to which he had perhaps grown accustomed he instantly adopted that which was better. In fact his function—and it is the function of every strong editor—was to receive suggestions sympathetically, to try out new men and new methods, and to take the full responsibility of keeping the good and of rejecting the bad. Bell, too, who was in more than one way responsible, must not be denied his full measure of acknowledgment. Bell administered a large part of the editorial side, he held the money bags, and no appointment could be made without his approval and sanction. Moberly Bell, as soon as the gold quarried out of the solid rock of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* had relieved him from immediate embarrassments, and set free resources which could be employed upon improving *The Times*, went in with Buckle and backed up the efforts of the reformers with all his might. Moberly Bell, as always, was after circulation, and he had come to realise that *The Times* must be made more attractive if it were to retain its old purchasers and to attract new ones. Capper, too, did invaluable service which only he could have done. He was not afraid when acting as Editor to try experiments, and many of Richmond's successes could not have been brought off without Capper's resolute support in their initial stages.

I have written of some of the jewels which during

the early years of this period of reform at Printing House Square were hung lavishly about the neck of Tenniel's old lady with the voluminous skirts and the Mid-Victorian poke bonnet. Why, it may be asked, if *The Times* had drawn to it and encouraged the brilliant team whose names have been mentioned—there were many others very good though less well known to the reading public—why, in that event, did not Bell get his heart's desire and see the weekly returns of circulation overtop all records? I am afraid that they did not, and I know that Bell was sadly disappointed. He has shown me figures of sales when *The Times* was as unpalatable as wet clay and printed in solid blocks of repellent type. He has shown me figures beside these of the reformed *Times* with all its brilliant articles and virile correspondents. And always the first set of figures has far exceeded in volume the depressing second set. "It sometimes seems to me," Bell would groan, "that the more we improve *The Times* the less willing people are to read it." This was, of course, not so. The sale of *The Times* did not respond to the efforts of reformers as might, perhaps, have been expected; but I am satisfied that, had it not been for the work of reform, there would have been a much greater falling off than that which did take place. *The Times* had at last narrowly escaped from the doom which deservedly awaits 'back numbers' in the newspaper press. Whether, with its price of threepence and its rather forbidding bulk, it could appeal to a sufficient number of the rising generation of readers—who were surrounded by

attractive penny and halfpenny papers—yet remained to be demonstrated. So far the figures suggested that it could not.

I attribute much of the lack of resilience of the reformed *Times*—before the circulation ‘stunts’ began—to technical deficiencies, partly editorial and partly mechanical. It had no Principal News Page upon which was set forth, as in a shop window, the outstanding news of the day; it had no News Editor charged with the duty of following up the events of the day and of anticipating the news of the morrow—there was no day staff on duty in the Editorial Department except the Editor’s Secretary; and the whole paper was infamously made up. No provision was made for the printing of late news, of news which arrived after the first edition had gone to press. In common with other London daily journals *The Times* had been compelled to go to press some two hours earlier than in the ‘nineties. This was done in order widely to increase the radius of the ‘breakfast table area’ which is the effective field of circulation for a morning journal. But whereas other London dailies published at least one other and much later edition for London and the immediate vicinity *The Times* did not until the summer of 1908.

While it cannot be denied that the neglect to appoint a News Editor, who with his attendant staff of reporters would be on duty by day, was due to the failure of Bell and Buckle to appreciate the importance of general home news, those other deficiencies which I have men-

tioned were mainly the effect of the hereditary conservatism which pervaded the printing department. In theory Moberly Bell had authority to call upon the Walter printing business to carry out his orders—or rather the orders of Mr. Walter, the Governing Proprietor. But since the printing business belonged in respect of two-thirds to Mr. Walter himself, and was managed by the other co-proprietor in respect of one-third—Godfrey Walter—it always, in fact, could say the last word. And seeing that neither Moberly Bell nor Buckle knew much about printing, or of the capacity of *The Times* plant, they could always be put off on the technical plea that suggestions of theirs were impracticable. The printing business owned by the two Walters was run as a private concern, and its charges—mainly due to the defective plant—were already so considerable that Moberly Bell dared not press upon it reforms which would have involved *The Times* as a newspaper in still higher charges. A London edition, though requiring no more than the opening up of a couple of late news pages, would have meant an increase in the printing bills, and Bell could not face any increase in the already large printing bills. A proper make-up, though it should not have cost more than a bad shovelling of the paper together, was denounced so often and so strenuously by the printing department that Bell busied himself with inventing excuses to send to complainants rather than with devising means to circumvent the objections of Godfrey Walter and of his ultra-conservative caseroom foremen.

So it came about that the editorial reforms failed to yield their full measure of effect upon circulation. This was partly due to the passion for small type, which killed much good stuff with readers of middle age—and quite a large proportion of the readers of *The Times* were men of middle age whose eyesight was not so keen as it had been. It was chiefly due to the total lack of orderly arrangement of the news pages. Bell and Buckle were assured that no better fashion of presenting the paper to its readers could be devised, and they accepted the deplorable situation as if it had been a Law of Nature or an Act of God. There was still to be seen every day the dreadful jumble of the 'nineties. There was no shop window in which brilliant contributions might be displayed. The position of the leader page was fixed, and the Foreign News page was properly made up by Chirol's assistants, but the remainder of the news was put together by the foreman printer upon no settled plan. No standing feature was ever upon the same page—relatively to the centre—upon two successive days. There were still the Inner and the Outer Sheets, and the paper was frequently delivered in two detached halves. *The Times* was beyond question a bother to read and people would not be bothered to read it. They saw how other daily papers were arranged and could not be brought to understand that what was feasible, say, for *The Daily Telegraph* was not feasible for *The Times*.

The City, an invaluable preserve both of readers and of advertisers, complained continually, and Moberly

Bell's attempts to answer the complaints became desperate. His common plea that an Index had been provided to meet the requirements of readers failed to satisfy anyone. The City, which understood organisation, bluntly retorted that a newspaper should be so arranged that an Index was not necessary. In his replies to critics of the make-up Moberly Bell's ingenuity failed. He could not defend the indefensible lack of arrangement and realised that he could not. Yet he tried. Hartley Withers once sent him a letter from the Governor of the Bank of England upon this perennial subject of complaint, and almost wept at the tone and temper of Bell's reply. For Moberly Bell, casting about for some new excuse, compared the 'necessary variations' in the make-up of *The Times* with the movements in the Bank Rate or in the price of Consols. "If," he went on, "the Governor of the Bank will try to make the Bank Rate invariable and the price of Consols invariable then I will try to make the arrangement of *The Times* invariable." After this Withers made no further attempts to get the make-up reformed, and I was forced to abandon my own efforts. It was of no use for us to worry Bell or Buckle when we knew that the real obstructionists, against whom they were powerless, resided in the printing department.

CHAPTER XIII

THE CIRCULATION CAMPAIGN

THE success of the Hooper and Jackson campaign for selling the Tenth Edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* brought a welcome flow of cash into the coffers of *The Times*, and Moberly Bell at once cast about for a method of employing his funds to increase the circulation of the paper. That problem of circulation was never absent from his mind. His weekly returns of sales still revealed a slow steady decline which, taking one year with another, had been going on for a period of thirty years. It was not large, yet sure, horribly sure. When Moberly Bell first showed the figures to me—he had them plotted out since 1869—I made a rough curve of what I called the ‘death rate’ and examined it carefully. My early actuarial training here came in, for I perceived a distinct resemblance between the fall in *The Times* circulation and the fall in numbers of a hypothetical population as set forth in an actuarial Life Table. I then made a calculation of what the death rate would be in a population resembling in years and station the readers of *The Times*. There was so clear a correspondence between the results of this calculation

and Moberly Bell's figures of declining sales that his own theory that subscribers were 'dying off' received corroboration. I have little doubt about the correctness of this conclusion. There was a certain, as yet unascertained, minimum of circulation for a paper like *The Times* below which it would not fall whatever happened. But all sales above this minimum were subject to the law of death; subscribers died off and were not replaced by their successors. So far no efforts at reform had succeeded in stopping the regular drain, though there were some indications of a slowing up in the rate of loss. This seemed to suggest that though we were not getting a sufficient number of new readers to compensate for the losses by death, yet that we were getting some new readers at any rate. This was encouraging.

Moberly Bell was not in favour of making a heavy cut in price. He saw that the cut must be from threepence to a penny, and the thought of running *The Times* at the price of a penny appalled him. His margin of sales revenue over costs of printing and of paper was not much even at threepence, and he saw that he could not make *The Times* pay at one penny except by such an enormous increase in circulation that his advertisement revenue would be doubled at least. *The Times* was printed on very good paper into the composition of which mechanical wood pulp was not permitted to enter. The cost of it daily was not much less than the whole net revenue which a penny *Times* would yield—at the same circulation. Bell strongly objected to the reduction in quality of the white paper which must

attend a great reduction in price. In those days it was not possible to consider the intermediate price of twopence. The twopenny price to-day of *The Times*, the *Telegraph*, and *The Morning Post* is roughly the equivalent of the old pre-war penny. Had *The Times* come down from threepence to twopence in the years before the war the advantage in sales at the unfamiliar price of twopence could scarcely have compensated for the immediate drop in sales revenue. These considerations determined Moberly Bell to retain the official price at threepence while employing part of his sales revenue in the form of inducements to casual readers to become regular subscribers. He has many a time assured me—and fortified his views with rapid calculations upon the backs of old envelopes—that it would pay him to expend a pound a year upon getting and keeping every new regular subscriber. That was the basis of his subscription scheme of 1904; the remainder of the scheme bore unmistakeable traces of the hand of Horace Hooper.

Moberly Bell wanted a largely increased number of regular subscribers; Hooper wanted an advertising 'stunt' which no man living knew better how to exploit. *The Times* with its heavy costs of printing and paper could not profitably be broadcasted among newsagents 'on sale or return.' For a Hooper advertising campaign there must be something new and striking to sell, and a definite closing date beyond which the sales would not extend. He loved an offer to be open for a certain time and then that offer to be with-

drawn. He got thereby his Going—Going—Gone, his Last Days, and the Very Last Day of All with its compelling psychological appeal upon a bewildered public. The Bell-Hooper final scheme as announced offered *The Times* at a price of £3, “a reduction of 23 per cent.,” to those who would subscribe for a year. The reduction in price was from £3 18s. per annum to £3 per annum. The offer was to take effect for a year as from July, 1904, and to be withdrawable at the end of a year. Therefore—and this is where Horace Hooper and his advertisements came in—those who wished to take advantage of the offer must get their applications into *The Times* office by the beginning of July. The working out of the scheme was rather complicated and was left in the hands of Hooper. It would have been bad policy to have drawn subscribers away from newsagents, so that the direct registration of annual subscribers at Printing House Square had to be reconciled with the supply through newsagents. This involved the organisation of a circulation staff which would be charged with the duty of keeping the subscribers regularly supplied through newsagents with their papers however much they might temporarily or permanently change their addresses. Every subscriber had to be a purchaser for himself; he was not allowed to sell again. No newsagent, for example, was permitted to subscribe for a number of copies at £3 a year, less the agent's discount, and then sell at threepence a copy. But if a subscriber nominated a newsagent as his supplier then that agent was allowed the trade discount upon the £3

subscription. The system of registering and watching over subscribers and newsagents was similar for this scheme of 1904 as it was for the Book Club scheme of 1905. It involved considerable expense, however well it might be organised. When I took over the charge of regular subscribers in 1908 from Hooper and Jackson—who had carried it on since July, 1904—I found that it occupied two or three men and about forty girls all their time to carry it out with the necessary swiftness and smoothness. We had to provide readily accessible accommodation for a great many thousand ‘jackets’—one for each subscriber—and to ring the changes on the movements of all these subscribers so that—provided a week’s notice was given—*The Times* would infallibly appear on a subscriber’s breakfast table whenever he was within the breakfast table area. All this registration business was made necessary by the conditions of the schemes of 1904 and 1905 and, though not in itself very formidable, added to their cost.

Moberly Bell was much too acute in mind not to perceive at once the most serious weakness both of the subscription project of 1904 and of the much more serious Book Club enterprise of 1905. For the moment I will consider the first only. It offered a substantial inducement to new readers to take *The Times* at slightly more than twopence per copy per day provided that they subscribed for a year. And at the same time—this was the fatal blot upon it—it offered a substantial inducement to present readers, who were paying threepence a day, to become annual subscribers and to save

thereby eighteen shillings a year, or about two-thirds of a penny a day. It was undoubtedly worth Bell's while to sacrifice eighteen shillings a year in sales revenue to get new annual subscribers, but it was not worth his while to hand over eighteen shillings a year to existing regular readers merely to get their names on his lists as annual subscribers. Suppose, by way of illustration, that for every one new subscriber three old readers turned themselves into annual subscribers on the new terms, then Bell obtained four readers in the place of three, and his sales revenue suffered to the extent of four times eighteen shillings, or £3 12s. In other words, he got four subscribers in the place of three, but he lost in doing so more than the whole amount paid by the fourth subscriber. That fourth (new) subscriber had not cost him the pound a year loss in sales revenue which he could afford, but a £3 12s. a year loss in sales revenue which he certainly could not afford. New readers, however desirable they may be, can cost too much, and Moberly Bell's new readers under the scheme of 1904 did cost him too much.

It is important that the imminence of this jagged rock should be clearly realised, for, as it turned out, the circulation project of 1904 split upon it, and the later Book Club enterprise also split upon it—though not quite to the same extent. There was a very rapid rush of people between May and July, 1904, to register their names as annual subscribers under the £3 a year offer, but when the lists had been closed and came to be made up it was manifest that not much more than

a quarter of the annual subscribers were new readers; the bulk of them were old readers who had cannily saved themselves eighteen shillings a year. Hooper was, perhaps, more seriously disappointed than was Moberly Bell. The combination of Bell and Hooper always reminded me of the Advice of the Self-Made Merchant to his Son—contained in that most shrewd of books by Lorimer the Editor of the *Saturday Evening Post* of Philadelphia:—"Employ optimists to get you business and pessimists to figure out the accounts." Horace Hooper was ever the optimist, superbly confident and out to get business; Moberly Bell was ever the pessimist who gave Hooper all the rope that he wanted yet never failed to figure out the accounts. So far as the 'E.B.' was concerned the optimist, Hooper, had scored heavily over the pessimist, Bell; yet when it came to that very tough proposition—extending the circulation of the partially reformed *Times*—the optimist, in his own language, had failed to deliver the goods. The scheme of 1904 did add to the lists of *The Times* the names of a large number of new subscribers but, so far as the sales revenue was concerned, they were an expense rather than a profit. They could not develop into a source of profit unless the advertisement revenue became stimulated sufficiently by the addition to the numbers of readers of *The Times* to compensate for the extra cost in paper and in printing which they threw upon Bell's shoulders.

That sentence will indicate the next step forthwith taken in the progress of Horace Hooper through

Printing House Square. He had been associated with Moberly Bell in obtaining more readers to the paper; he was now to be associated with Moberly Bell in 'boosting' the advertisement department. From 1905 up to the sale of *The Times* in 1908 Hooper was the manager *de facto* of the advertisement department. He was a curiously inspiring force and hustled the rather somnolent staff to some purpose; he certainly added to the revenue, but the black trail of his passage made a horrid mess of the once decent pages of *The Times* newspaper. That unhappy journal broke out into a rash of ugly block type, even upon its orderly front page, and classes of illustrated advertisements were accepted which to look upon must have curdled the hereditary Walter blood. When I think of the gross splodges left by Hooper's black hands—it fell to me to clean up after him—I can sympathise with what must have been Mr. Walter's feelings throughout the Hooper epoch.

CHAPTER XIV

I BECOME AN EDITOR

IN the life of every man who achieves some measure of success in an art, a profession, or a business there is a critical period which determines whether he shall remain struggling in the stony valleys or climb upwards towards the heights. My complaint against most biographers of the great and eminent is that they do not pay sufficient attention to these critical periods in the lives of their subjects. It may often be that the information at their disposal is imperfect, because the eminent ones become so much more interested in their eminence than in their early struggles that they omit to leave behind them adequate records of that part of their careers which really counted for the most with them. My own critical period began with my decision to go outside Printing House Square in the autumn of 1901, and ended with my return as an editor in May, 1904. I went out under the shadow of failure and returned in high favour with both Moberly Bell and Buckle. The means by which the failure was lived down and the favour gained have been fully dealt with in the chapter entitled 'My

Adventures Outside.' The story of the manner in which from the beginning of my career in journalism—a profession in which competition is for most aspirants of the fiercest—I hit upon a line of advance which turned the flank of competition so that I never felt it as a serious factor, may be as instructive now as it was nearly a generation since. My experience suggests that in journalism, as in any other profession, or business, or art—and journalism is all these three things rolled into one—the man of individuality who marches along a special line of his own devising can penetrate the mass of general practitioners as if they had for him no physical existence.

In May, 1904, I received a note from Moberly Bell asking me to call upon him at my earliest convenience. I climbed up those wooden stairs which led to the open door of the Manager's Room. Moberly Bell, sitting behind the big desk, glared round the corner at me. The eyes of challenge softened and he welcomed me with the smile to which I had now become accustomed. Our interview was very brief, for by this time Bell and I had learned to know one another and to trust one another. He explained to me his new circulation scheme which was about to be launched, and the inducements which he had in mind to offer to subscribers.

"I want to have a weekly Financial Supplement," said he. "Will you design and edit it for me?"

I consented at once and in a few minutes we had settled terms. I was to give up my work for other daily and weekly papers while retaining all my outside

work for *The Times*, and remaining free to contribute to magazines and reviews. This arrangement would ensure for me, from editorial salary and space rates, at least £1000 a year from *The Times*. Just two and a half years earlier I had gone outside because Moberly Bell would not pay me more than £300 a year.

"Have you any ideas for this Supplement?" I enquired.

"None," answered Bell. "It is to be entirely your job. I want to start publication within two months."

So that was that. After nine years of struggle, interspersed with a great deal of fun and some few small triumphs, I had achieved that editorial chair to which I had aspired since at the age of fifteen my eyes had been directed towards it. And for me it was an ideal chair, however lacking in elevation. Though no more than a departmental editor, I was to be given a blank sheet of paper and a free hand to turn it into a weekly journal of my own devising. No conditions of any kind were laid down either by Bell or Buckle, and neither of them, at any time during the years which followed, ever interfered with me. They accorded me full editorial discretion and backed me up with the kindest encouragement. For success or failure I had to depend upon myself alone. No editor could ask for more; very few editors have been privileged to be granted so much. I had no formal agreement with Moberly Bell, and never had at any time. We fixed everything up between us in an interview which did not occupy ten minutes, and he wrote me half a dozen lines

thereafter, setting forth my new terms of payment. That was all. With a straight man such as Bell was it was more than enough. He always did as he was done by. If anyone tried to get the better of him he came down upon him ruthlessly, but never, in all my experience of him, did he attempt to go back upon a definite understanding. Right at the end of my career with *The Times*, in a manner fully characteristic, he saved *The Times* £125 at my expense, and laughed joyfully over doing it. But that, as he cruelly pointed out, was due to my own silly fault. For his part as a trustee of *The Times*—and he always regarded himself as a trustee—he could not pay, even to an old friend, one penny more than he had definitely bargained to pay.

Within two days I had completed my scheme for the new Supplement, in shape and size similar to the 'Literary Supplement,' and sent it in to Moberly Bell. He had asked for a 'Financial Supplement.' I responded by giving him a 'Financial and Commercial Supplement,' a publication of vastly wider scope and wider interest. *The Times* was already adequately supplied with financial news, as it was understood at the City Office. What I proposed in my own Supplement was to deal with the Commerce and Industry of the United Kingdom in relation to the business of the world. It was an ambitious project which no publication could possibly realise though the attempt seemed to be worth while. I proposed to have intelligent and intelligible articles and weekly reports upon all the staple industries of the country, and to establish a service of articles

and reports from the principal business centres of the world. That briefly was the design which I despatched to Bell and which he showed to his close associate in the circulation scheme, Horace Hooper, after Buckle as Editor in Chief had approved of it.

This was the beginning of my relations with Hooper, and with an extraordinary creature called Haxton who was Hooper's chief advertisement writer. Haxton was the American author of those riotous advertisements which had spread panic among the British people—lest they should miss the Last Chance of subscribing to the 'E.B.'—and had inspired Graves and Lucas to put forth their delicious parodies. Haxton, though his name was unknown to the public, enjoyed at that time a fame for his works which has been vouchsafed to very few authors. Hooper and Haxton glowed with enthusiasm over my poor little dummy of the forthcoming Supplement. "This," declared Hooper in his slow syncopated rag-time style of speech, "is the finest thing which has been produced by any newspaper since the world began." Those may not have been his precise words, yet their substance was precisely what I have set down. Haxton, whose high-pitched voice and sustained drawl made his manner of speech resemble the neighing of a horse, said ditto to his boss, and added that he saw splendid advertising matter in my scheme. Both of these experts in publicity fastened upon the proposed reports from the principal business centres of the Empire and foreign countries. They dilated upon these reports—for which I had as yet made no manner

of preparation—as if they were destined to work a revolution in British overseas trade. It fell to my lot many years later to be in at the beginning of the Government's Department of Overseas Trade with its corps of Trade Commissioners in the Dominions and Colonies, and its Commercial Counsellors and Secretaries attached to Embassies and Legations in foreign countries. No one at the Foreign Office, the Board of Trade, or at the new Department of Overseas Trade—though they had at their back all the influence and resources of the British Government—predicted for their labours half the resulting benefits to British trade which Hooper and Haxton instantly claimed for the correspondents of my forthcoming 'Financial and Commercial Supplement.' Hooper assured me that he would support my scheme with Bell for all that his influence was worth, and Haxton declared that he would instantly embark upon the preparation of startling advertisements. His genius for publicity had, it appeared, taken fire.

I was seriously alarmed. My scheme was quite good in its way, a small way. It might gain for me some editorial credit and for *The Times* some new readers. But if it were to be cracked up in the style of Hooper and Haxton, my Supplement, upon its appearance in July, would be laughed at from Land's End to John o' Groat's. My appeal was going to be to men of business who, though they might be prevailed upon to subscribe to the Tenth Edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* by Haxton's auctioneering advertisements, would be able

to size up at once the merits of my Supplement, and to compare at once the mean performance with the fulsome promises. My first editorial cockle-shell looked like being swamped in a raging torrent of American advertising.

So off I went to Moberly Bell and poured my woes into his ears. His laughter, though it could not compare with Buckle's booming roar, yet struck upon my distressed ears as of indecent loudness. I was obliged to laugh with him. "This," observed Bell, "will be an interesting experience for you. I have had years of it." Then I began to realise what a life he must have led with the preparation of the 'E.B.' on the one hand and with these exuberant advertisers of it on the other. Maybe the *Encyclopædia Britannica* was all that they claimed for it; I felt no such confidence in regard to my Supplement. Bell, after he had enjoyed his fill of laughing at me, gave me assurances that I should see and be permitted to censor all Haxton's advertisements. This was something, though not, perhaps, very much. If Haxton were about to let loose his American pen, and write as he had talked, no effort in censorship of mine could keep him within the limits of approximate veracity. And so it proved. He fastened upon my Colonial and Foreign Correspondents, of whom I had provisionally chosen no more than a bare half-dozen, and wrote of them as experts of special eminence stationed ready and eager to begin operations in every commercial centre of the wide world. When I declined to furnish him with the names of more than a few

foreign or colonial cities he seized a Gazetteer and supplied himself. He led off with the modest declaration that what *The Times* was about to do was properly the duty of the British Government, yet as that Government had shown itself lacking in a sense of its obligations to the commercial community, *The Times* had determined to fill the chasm which yawned in the supply of commercial information available for British manufacturers and merchants. Then followed exuberant accounts of what the 'Financial and Commercial Supplement' had set itself to perform. Though the advertisements which appeared were not half so outrageous as those which I had tried to censor, yet, if a hardened journalist can blush and feel shame, I blushed and felt shame at the very sight of them in the pages of *The Times*. The curious thing was that after I began publication of the Supplement no one called me to account for not achieving the impossible level of performance 'promised and vowed' for me by my godfather Haxton. I expect that after the recent debauch of the 'E.B.' advertising the public was feeling sick and sorry and either did not read Haxton's new masterpieces, or if they read them did not take them too seriously.

My first printed dummy of the 'Financial and Commercial Supplement'—which was published free of charge with one issue of *The Times* each week—is dated June 6th, 1904, and my first number appeared on July 18th. It was very well received, for just before I was ready to begin publication I had a big stroke of

luck. Many times in my career unexpected gifts of Fortune have come along to put a coping stone upon my efforts. This time it was the hitherto unpublished accounts for thirty-three years of the White Star Line, which had just been purchased for a great many millions by the International Mercantile Marine. I analysed these accounts, which were of remarkable interest, and presented the results on the front page of my first number. The article was read and quoted widely on both sides of the Atlantic. For years afterwards business men would remind me of it, and say that it read like an almost unbelievable romance of shipping. The White Star Line, retained in the hands of a few proprietors, had at the time of its sale reserves amounting to three and three-quarter times its total capital, and its immensely valuable fleet had been written down in the books to £2 a ton! Once only in my subsequent experience have I encountered a commercial undertaking which, by the exercise of financial prudence, has piled up reserves in this fashion and written down its assets in this fashion out of current earnings. The second example was the Glasgow Tramways, which accumulated a depreciation fund until it amounted to more than the capital cost of the whole system.

My 'Financial and Commercial Supplement' was a jolly little Imperium, of which I was both editor and manager directly responsible to Buckle and to Moberly Bell, and left by them untrammelled in the discharge of my responsibilities. I had my own tiny advertisement department, which before very long yielded a sufficient

revenue to make the enterprise show a comfortable profit. I made the paper up myself on regular system—which is, of course, much more simple with a weekly than with a daily paper—and not even the Walter Printing Business gave me any trouble. It is but fair to say of Godfrey Walter—of whom in relation to *The Times* itself I may have seemed to write harshly—that he was always helpful whenever I had occasion to seek his help on the printing side. I was highly fortunate in the assistant whom I engaged to act as my pupil and deputy. This was Cuthbert (‘Jack’) Maughan, the son of an old friend who was Secretary of The Marine Insurance Company. Young Maughan aspired to become a journalist and I was induced by his father to give him a trial. No trial could have had happier results both for Maughan and for me. He quickly learned to take my place as Editor of the Supplement whenever I went on leave, and he acted as my devil in the City for the work, mainly insurance in its numerous branches, which I retained there. I could absent myself on holiday completely confident that my understudy would not spoil my part. Cuthbert Maughan is still in the service of Printing House Square; he carries on and has developed much of the work which he began with me, and his name stands at the top of my private list of Harcourt Kitchin’s Young Men. Nothing can give greater satisfaction to an old journalist and editor than to see his chosen Young Men flourish.

I have written of the old traditions of *The Times*

which under the guardianship of Buckle and Capper were cherished as the True Religion of *The Times* and of British journalism. Two of them were editorial; the third appertained to management. They were: the impartial presentation of news as news without regard for editorial opinions; the care and maintenance of accuracy of fact and statement; and the total absence of collusion between editorial and advertisement departments. These three traditions were, I am happy to believe, as zealously guarded in my Supplement as they were in *The Times* itself. I had every week to deal with Commercial subjects which were matters of intense political controversy. The Tariff Reform Campaign of Mr. Joseph Chamberlain was in full swing, and *The Times* was editorially a supporter of Tariff Reform. I did not permit—and Buckle would not have permitted—the political views expressed in the leading articles to influence in any way the special informative articles which I published in my Supplement. My correspondents gave facts as they saw them and drew inferences which, in their view, those facts warranted. In articles which I wrote myself I followed the same course. I deliberately refrained from reading either political speeches or leading articles dealing with political subjects; this was in order that unconscious bias might be avoided. Now and then one could not be wholly unconscious that political partisans employed articles taken from my Supplement as sticks with which to beat Mr. Chamberlain, or his political supporter the Editor of *The Times*. The use to which my articles were

put was none of my business. My job was to ensure their impartiality and their substantial accuracy. Now and then, however much I might try to shut out from my placid editorial room the storms of political controversy which raged outside, my sense of humour, always irrepressible, would take charge. Though the year in which I began, 1904, was not notably prosperous, it was succeeded by a year of recovery which was not, to say the least, of conspicuous assistance to the Tariff Reform Campaign. At about the time when the devastating results of the Election of January, 1906, were pouring in night after night and casting a deep gloom over the Editor's Room downstairs, I was producing on the floor above a series of highly cheerful articles descriptive of the Trade of 1905. My position of independence, in these trying circumstances for ardent politicians, is the best evidence possible of the strict observance by the Editor's Room of the fundamental principle that though News might and should influence Opinions yet Opinions should upon no account be allowed to influence News.

It may seem strange in these days when so many newspapers would appear to be run by their advertisement departments that in *The Times* of old—and I believe in the new *Times* which has been restored to us—advertisers were not allowed to influence the selection or presentation of news. Advertisers knew so well that an attempt would be useless that they rarely made the attempt. I do not think that Moberly Bell, during the lamentable Book War, would have so savagely

turned his controversial shafts upon the publishers had they not withdrawn their advertisements from *The Times* and the 'Literary Supplement' as a move in the war against *The Times* Book Club. In the eyes of Moberly Bell the advertisement columns of *The Times* and of the 'Literary Supplement' had no concern with the policy which *The Times* might adopt in relation to the Book Club. From the moment when these advertisements were withdrawn it was impossible for Bell to negotiate in any way with the publishers. Had he shown himself willing to do so it would have seemed that he was prepared to bargain with advertisers for the return of their advertisements—the last thing which he would have consented to do with any advertisers. Much as he loved *The Times* he would rather have ceased publication of it than have adapted his policy to the demands of advertisers.

In my own little advertisement department, of which I was in control under Moberly Bell, while I directed and co-operated with my advertising people there was no collusion of any kind between the editorial and advertising sides. An advertiser might be informed that an article on such a subject was to appear in such an issue, and that it might be worth his while to advertise in that issue; that was all. No advertiser, no matter how much he were prepared to spend, could get an editorial paragraph or an editorial line out of me. I am convinced, after the experience of twenty years which have passed since those days, that collusion between editorial and advertisement departments is as

bad for business as it is for editorial credit. The stiffer editors and managers are with advertisers the more advertisers respect them. The one sure way to make an advertiser move Heaven and Earth to get his announcements into one's columns is to bar them against him. It was on the advertising side, nearly twenty years ago, that I did *The Times* a service and sowed a seed which has since borne the most lavish of golden crops. If *The Times* since then had repaid a fraction of its debt to me I should have made that fortune out of journalism which has always been denied to me. It was I, in my 'Financial and Commercial Supplement,' who broke down the editorial and managerial embargo on the acceptance as advertisements of reports of Company Meetings. Until I broke down that embargo *The Times* continued to give a handsome amount of space to company meetings as part of the City news, and to maintain a staff of reporters to deal with them. What I did was to turn a source of expense into a source from whence has flowed a very large revenue. Like most great deeds this one of mine began in a small way.

For years Buckle and Bell had held the view that the acceptance of the report of a company meeting as a paid advertisement was an immoral act. They were supported in this view by Wynnard Hooper, the City Editor, who had once perpetrated a leading article designed to prove the immorality of the act. I need not enter into their reasons. The most important one was that discussion at a meeting which was of much

public interest, and which ought to be made public, might be suppressed by directors in paid-for advertisements of that meeting. My view was that morality or immorality depended upon circumstances which it was within the power of a newspaper to control. In order that reports of company meetings might be acceptable as advertisements they must be fair reports, taken whenever possible by one's own reporters, and must give both what the directors were willing to pay for and also, whenever necessary in the public interest, what they desired to conceal. In other words that the newspaper which printed the advertisements must retain control over what appeared in them. I should not have succeeded in my fight had I not possessed at my disposal advertisement columns in the 'Financial and Commercial Supplement,' which though published with *The Times* were not of *The Times*. This distinction may seem the trifling of a casuist, yet it was of vast importance. For I succeeded in winning for my Supplement a concession which at that time I could not have won for *The Times*. It was at last agreed that an experiment in the 'Financial and Commercial Supplement'—the sideshow of a chartered libertine named Harcourt Kitchin—might be tried if the traditional practice of *The Times* itself were maintained unimpaired. So everyone was made happy by a truly British compromise. I got my advertisement reports of company meetings and quickly proved that they could be inserted without hurt to public morals if due precautions were taken; Buckle, Bell, and Wynnard Hooper

continued to ride their high horse and to insert company meetings not as profitable advertisements but as a rather expensive and voluminous branch of news. I started cautiously. I labelled all my company meetings as 'advertisements,' and I had them all reported by the regular City reporters who supplied *The Times* itself. And so we continued to live side by side; the immoral Supplement with its revenue from company meetings, and the moral *Times* with its expense of company meetings instead of revenue. There could, of course, be but one end to such a comedy. *The Times* came round to my view: that if the reports were fair and were not 'cooked' they could properly be made a source of revenue. I understand that *The Times* charges now five times as much per column as my little Supplement was able to charge at the beginning, and that the annual revenue derived from the advertisements of company meetings is prodigious. I go through *The Times* now and then during the height of the season for company meetings—for they enjoy their times and seasons like books or partridges—and reckon up what *The Times* must get out of them. Then I credit myself as parent with an imaginary royalty of two and a half per cent. and feel very rich indeed.

My Supplement, with its immoral reports of company meetings and its other advertisements, prospered exceedingly. It changed its shape and its day of publication for reasons which are of no interest to-day to anyone except to me. As from July, 1906, under a

new arrangement with Moberly Bell I drew out of it a bonus of about £250 each half-year in addition to my salary and other emoluments; this little sheet of my own creation was one of the best friends a man ever had. It established me as an editor; it made me Assistant Manager of *The Times*, and later on Editor of *The Glasgow Herald*. Thirteen years after I had conjured it out of nothing in less than two months, Sir Hubert Llewellyn Smith, then Permanent Secretary of the Board of Trade, gave me just one month—with the Christmas holidays intervening that month was cut down to about three effective weeks—within which to design and produce what was, for all practical purposes, an entirely new ‘Journal’ of the Board of Trade and of its allied Department of Overseas Trade. I performed this acrobatic feat successfully within time simply because I had done very much the same thing before and knew precisely how to set about it.

My ‘Financial and Commercial Supplement’ of *The Times* has disappeared in body though its soul goes marching on. It has suffered absorption, partly into the main body of *The Times*, and partly into the weekly ‘Trade Supplement,’ which is a separate publication. What it set out to do remains done. It destroyed once and for always the old notion that Finance began and ended with the Money Market and the Stock Exchange, and that Commerce was adequately served by agency reports about Pig Iron being dull and Lard firm. When it started twenty years since it was a pioneer; now every schoolboy knows that Great

Britain and the Empire live by Finance and Commerce and cannot learn too much about them. I may not have played any notable part in the work of education, yet when I look back upon that little Supplement of mine, and of the kindly interest which my contemporaries took in it, I feel that my time and my efforts were not wholly wasted.

CHAPTER XV

THE TIMES BOOK CLUB

"Title for the Manager of *The Times* (from the Booksellers' point of view): *Le BELL (d—n) sans merci.*"

Punch, Oct. 17, 1906.

It is not with any feelings of pleasure that I write about *The Times* Book Club, that grandiose scheme of Horace Hooper which precipitated, though it did not cause, the disaster of 1908. Had there never been a Book Club, with the Book War which arose out of it, and was from the first inherent in its conception, there must have come an end of the century-old Constitution of *The Times* with its private partnership and its Walter printing business. Some of the partners were already taking legal steps to have that partnership dissolved before ever the Book Club was launched, and no one can have read me thus far without clearly comprehending the unbearable disabilities against which Moberly Bell was struggling to keep *The Times* alive.

Those who did not know Moberly Bell in his strength and in his weakness may have been misled by the furious zeal and energy which he brought to bear upon the Book War controversy. No sooner had

the battle been joined than he galloped into the arena with his sharp and acrid pen, and those who ventured to run a course with him very soon broke off the engagement and looked around for some less redoubtable opponent. The onlookers did not understand the intense loyalty of Moberly Bell towards any men with whom, or for whom, he worked. He had gone into the Book Club, however much he may have disliked it at the first and dreaded its developments, and once in it he fought for it to the last ounce of energy in his body and the last drop of ink in his pen. The Americans have a useful word 'quitter' to describe a man who quails before opposition. Moberly Bell loved opposition, a fight in which he joyfully engaged brought out all his most sterling qualities; he was precisely what a 'quitter' is not, he was the most resolutely enduring of 'stickers' who might be killed in a hopeless fight yet could never be driven from the field.

About some things Moberly Bell was always open with me after my return to Printing House Square; about other things he was curiously secretive. He would lay before me all the traditionally sacred figures of the circulation, revenue, and expenditure of *The Times*, and discuss with me the most intimate of his difficulties. Yet he told me nothing of the details of the Book Club project until after it had been launched, and then, when he was inextricably committed to it, always defended it actively in my presence. He knew that I loathed it, as I think did most of my editorial colleagues, and rather encouraged me to tear the scheme

to pieces in order that he might discover in himself fresh arguments in support of it. He was at least as keenly alive to the defects and dangers of it as I was—probably more keenly—yet he refused to acknowledge the defects and scorned the dangers. The Book Club, he declared, was going to double the circulation of *The Times* and to add very largely to the advertisement revenue, and however much it might cost would in the end prove fully worth the cost. By this time the comparative failure of the circulation push of 1904 had convinced him that *The Times* would not sell itself on its own merits. It was, he maintained, above the heads and beyond the capacity to understand of more than one in a thousand of the population. He could not meet the very high costs of running it if supported only by one in a thousand of the population—however influential and wealthy this remnant might be. Therefore it was necessary to attract at least another one per thousand by adventitious means, the offer of a Book Club service free of charge. He had tried a reduction in price to annual subscribers and had lost all faith in the efficacy of price reduction. If the new subscribers for whom he thirsted must be obtained by purchase, he would buy them by giving away some valuable consideration with *The Times* rather than by making any more attempts at reducing the price. To some of us on the editorial side it seemed that to confess publicly that *The Times* could no longer be sold in virtue of its own merits was to abandon the moral case for its continued existence.

I do not think, from what Moberly Bell let drop during his many discussions with me, that Horace Hooper had a light job in convincing him that the Book Club scheme was a practicable proposition. For the central financial defect in it was precisely the defect which had brought the circulation scheme of 1904 to an end after twelve months of trial. I have explained how each new subscriber under this scheme became a liability rather than an asset, because for each new subscriber who paid £3 a year three old subscribers saved eighteen shillings a year apiece. A somewhat similar result was certain to arise out of the offer to annual subscribers of a Book Club service. The existing readers of *The Times* would naturally rush at it, on the instinctive human principle of getting something for nothing, and the cost of the Book Club service to all of these deadheads would have to be borne by the subscriptions of the new entrants. Moberly Bell, though he had small experience of finance as understood by the City Office, could penetrate as rapidly and certainly into the heart of a maze of figures as Buckle could into the heart of a solid Blue Book. He saw that as each adherent to the Book Club would cost him so much per annum out of his sales revenue—old readers as well as new readers—his net sales revenue, after providing for the subsidy which he would have to pay into the coffers of the Book Club, might suffer serious diminution. But as he expected, and openly announced that he expected, to double his circulation he was prepared to sacrifice £100,000 in sales

revenue in order to do it. For, as he also publicly proclaimed with quite splendid audacity, if he did succeed in doubling his circulation the increased value of his advertising columns would yield him far more than the £100,000 which he gave away in sales revenue. Like Danton, Moberly Bell loved audacity—his motto was *Toujours de l'audace*.

I have refreshed my memory by going back to the files of *The Times* of the early autumn of 1905 and by reading again those advertisements in which Moberly Bell revealed his mind to the British public. Those preliminary advertisements are pure Bell; there is no Haxton about them. As I read them again after so many years Moberly Bell came back to where I stood in the basement of the London Library. He limped painfully up and down under the lights just as he used to do in the Manager's Room at Printing House Square, his loose frock coat swinging about his big body, and his voice proclaiming his unalterable conviction that the Book Club ought to have done all that he had expected of it. If it hadn't been for that damned Book War, and those damned foolish publishers and booksellers! It was their crass stupidity which ruined what was the most hopeful project to save *The Times*, and all that *The Times* meant for England, that had ever sprung from the mind of man! I should not now be writing this book if I did not believe that Moberly Bell would have liked me to write it.

The finance of the Book Club needs some brief

explanation. It was, like the preliminary announcements, pure Bell of the ripest vintage. The Book Club itself was Horace Hooper, an incorrigible optimist who never shrank from risking his own and his partner's 'E.B.' profits upon new enterprises. Moberly Bell had little money to risk, except his present and prospective sales revenue, and as trustee for *The Times* he was determined to limit his risks. So over the finance of the Book Club he 'stung' Hooper and Jackson very severely. They must at the end have been as anxious to be quit of the Book Club and its liabilities as Lord Northcliffe was to be rid of their association with Printing House Square. Moberly Bell threw all the speculative risks of the Book Club upon the backs of Hooper and Jackson. He agreed to pay so much per head of each subscriber to *The Times* who became a member of the Book Club. This subsidy per head was not nearly enough to meet the costs of the extremely lavish circulating library service which Hooper had devised and promised in the advertisements of the scheme. Hooper and Jackson were left to make up the balance of library costs out of the profits of selling books at the Club, and out of what they might ultimately draw from a strange arrangement under which they shared in the additional revenue derived by *The Times* from an increase in its circulation. This hypothetical profit-sharing scheme—which never, I am sure, brought in a single dollar to Hooper and Jackson—was a typical Bell product, and was typically expressed on a single sheet of letter paper. He took a sales revenue

of so much, and an advertisement revenue of so much—both high figures—and agreed that when, and if, these figures were exceeded Hooper and Jackson should rank for a large proportion of the surplus. It will be seen that this extremely shrewd bargain on the part of Bell—please remember that he was dealing with two most astute Americans—limited the liability of *The Times* to the annual subsidy per head of the subscriber-members of the Book Club, and that Hooper and Jackson had to make good their predictions of greatly increased revenue to *The Times* before they could screw another dollar out of Moberly Bell. All the capital required for establishing the Book Club had to be provided by Hooper and Jackson, and they had also to pay Bell rent for the Oxford Street building which he bought in the name of Mr. Walter. *The Times*, as a newspaper, owned nothing except the copyright, so that it had no capital and no means of raising any. A purchase, such as that of the lease of the Oxford Street home of the Book Club, had to be made in the name of Mr. Walter, and any funds raised by mortgage on that lease were lent to Mr. Walter. As an unincorporated partnership of private persons *The Times* itself does not appear to have been legally able to buy a sub-editor's blue pencil (except by paying cash down) or to borrow a sixpence. When it entered into engagements and assumed liabilities Mr. Walter appeared in person as Governing Proprietor and committed his fellow partners under the authority from them which he had inherited.

The book service guaranteed by the Book Club could not be given in return for the small subsidy allowed by Moberly Bell for each subscriber to *The Times*. And in addition free delivery was promised within the London area. Subscribers could obtain within exceedingly wide limits the loan of any book for which they asked, and Hooper and Jackson could not possibly meet the costs of running the Club and the attached bookshop unless their turnover of books was very large and rapid. What they proposed to do from the first was to scrap and sell at once at an attractive discount any book which ceased to be in effective demand in the library. This part of the scheme—it was the part which contained within it the seeds of the subsequent Book War—was announced at the beginning with the frankness shown by Moberly Bell in explaining his side of the venture. “Nearly new books” were promised to subscribers “at special discounts averaging half-price.” Hooper and Jackson could not afford to keep any dead or slow stock; they must sell at almost any sacrifice in discount any book which did not circulate freely in the library, or which did not go off readily in the book shop at its published price. One cannot now read the preliminary announcements of the Book Club, in the light of what I have told concerning the financial arrangements made between Moberly Bell and Horace Hooper, without seeing that a clash was bound to come within a short time between the Club and the booksellers, and through them between the Club and the publishers. Booksellers could not order books from publishers and

keep them on sale at a definite net price unless they were assured a close time within which to dispose of them to purchasers. They could not sell those books at the full net price if *The Times* Book Club in London were offering the same books at a discount on the net price. The booksellers wanted a close time, put at six months from the date of publication, within which to sell net price books; the Book Club wanted to clear off books, any books, at any time or price which suited the system which Hooper and Jackson were working. The conflict between the booksellers and the Book Club was inherent in the scheme from its inception, and when it came the publishers were obliged to support their customers, the booksellers, scattered all over the country, who subscribed for their new books.

Hooper and Jackson bought books for the library at the lowest trade prices and they could afford to sell them in a month or two—if no longer in demand in the library—at a discount of 40 per cent. The small loss incurred in this way could be met out of *The Times* subsidy. But if Hooper and Jackson were obliged to load up their shelves for six months with unwanted books, becoming less wanted with the passage of each month, they could not turn over their capital quickly enough to make the Book Club pay its way. It was a conflict of financial interest on both sides: between Hooper and Jackson, who had a heavy speculative investment in the Book Club, and the booksellers of the United Kingdom. *The Times*, which was discredited by the Book War, was not really a belligerent

at all. The Book Club, which was the active belligerent in an indefensible campaign, was in respect of its properties about two-thirds Hooper and Jackson, its policy was the original declared policy of Hooper and Jackson, and Moberly Bell only came into the fight because he threw himself into it. Loyalty to his associates was the impelling force at the outset; afterwards sheer lust of battle drove him onwards. Moberly Bell's warfare with the publishers by correspondence in *The Times* proceeded side by side with the bookselling warfare which was being waged without. And the most striking thing about Bell's conduct of his part of the campaign was that, though he really had no case at all, he made out a case which seemed in the eyes of thousands of readers to put the publishers wholly in the wrong. I have already stated their case, which in the end triumphed completely. Moberly Bell's case, presented with all his literary skill and wealth of illustration, was that a book was a commodity exactly like any other commodity. If he bought a book it was his, just as if he bought a cigar it was his. If he wanted to sell a book or a cigar, which he owned, it was his to sell at any price which he could get for it. The publishers, though they had perfectly good cause for representing a book as something altogether different from a cigar or a lump of pig iron, could not stand up to Moberly Bell, the newspaper controversialist. They fell silent and left him to his barren victory on paper. Their reply was the *argumentum ad hominem*, the brutal reply of superior force: they refused to supply the Book Club

with any books to sell as it might sell cigars or pig iron, and they withdrew all their advertisements from *The Times* and the 'Literary Supplement.' I have no intention of following the various phases of the contest. It continued for some eighteen months and left behind it a trail of wreckage. It raised to the temperature of boiling the previously rather tepid efforts of some partners in *The Times* to have that partnership dissolved, and it entangled Moberly Bell and *The Times* in the tortuous manœuvres of Hooper and Jackson's Book Club. The prestige of *The Times* suffered terribly; and no one realised more bitterly than Moberly Bell himself, in spite of his paper victory, that his last campaign for circulation and success had been irretrievably lost.

His disappointment was the more grievous to bear because it had appeared at the outset of the Book Club that the problem of circulation had been solved. The offer by *The Times* of a lavish book club service met with an eager public response. Subscribers poured in, and though Moberly Bell did not double his circulation—or anything like double it—his weekly returns of sales became highly gratifying to read. Though his new readers yielded little or nothing in net revenue, because he had to pay the Book Club subsidy on all subscribers both old and new, yet he was able with their help to push the advertising side of *The Times*. Though Hooper took no very active part in the daily conduct of the advertisement department he was deeply interested in it under the new Hooper and Jackson

agreement. During 1906, a year of tranquillity although the rumbles of the coming Book War soon began to be heard, *The Times* did seem to be entering upon a new lease of active life. Both sales and advertisements—excluding the Book Club subsidy as a deduction from revenue—were upon a higher level than they had reached for many years past. On the editorial side there had been notable reforms. To those who would be at pains to overcome the obstacles of presentation and of make-up *The Times* was a newspaper of high value. Chirol's Foreign News Page of that year reached a level of quality which has not been surpassed before or since. Richmond's 'Literary Supplement' and his exponents of Sport had struck new notes which charmed very many readers, both old and new. On the side of its City News, and of my little offspring the 'Financial and Commercial Supplement,' we could challenge comparison with any newspaper in the Kingdom. Printing House Square harboured a very happy family. Even the Home sub-editors, the Cinderellas, had long since vacated their sour cavern of Number Seven and looked upon Queen Victoria Street from the bright windows of Number Two. Money which had been so tight was less tight. We all enjoyed the pause before the storm, and to few upon the editorial side was it given to know that not one only but two storms were about to break. Of the Book War when it came all were distressingly conscious, but I doubt if there were more than two or three in Printing House Square—outside the circle of the Editor's Room—who had ever been told of an

action put down for hearing in the Chancery Division under the label of 'Sibley v. Walter.' It was this apparently insignificant item in the Cause List, within which had been simmering since the previous year the discontent of partners in *The Times* proprietorship, which was destined ere long to boil over and to dissolve in judicial steam the century-old partnership.

CHAPTER XVI

THE REVOLT OF THE PARTNERS

MOBERLY BELL possessed in supreme degree that type of moral courage which is at its highest and best when the surrounding circumstances are the most desperate. The deeper the gloom the more intensely flamed the inward light of his dauntless soul. He would have made an ideal leader of the forlornest of forlorn hopes. This quality in his courage, which expanded with every call upon it, differed widely from that proverbial characteristic of the Englishman to go on fighting because he does not know when he is beaten. The capacity to pluck victory from defeat by sheer endurance may, and often does, arise from stupidity, from inability to recognise defeat when one sees it. Bell's courage did not spring from any deficiencies in intellectual vision. He was a man of great and highly cultivated intellect, and the eyes of his mind lacked nothing in acuteness of vision. There was not a moment all through that long fight of his for the body and soul of *The Times* during which he did not realise and face the certainty of ultimate defeat. It was because he knew that he could not win, and yet fought on, that I venture to describe his

moral courage as of supreme quality. To perceive clearly that one cannot win, that the longer one endures the more certainly one will die fighting, and still to go on with no thought of weakening—that is to pass a test to which very few are subjected, and from which fewer still would not withdraw if they could see a way out.

Moberly Bell might have withdrawn at any time. *The Times* was no property of his. He was no more than the paid servant of an employer who towards the end of his service tried to get rid of him, and at any time for years before that would, I think, rather gladly have accepted his resignation. Bell had every inducement to get quit of *The Times* before it crashed about his ears. He was not a rich man, he had small resources of his own, yet for years he maintained a high social position in London at considerable financial loss to himself. Had he chosen to put his name and services up to auction he could have obtained from firms or companies in the City twice or thrice the small remuneration which he was content to draw from *The Times*. Had he cared for money he could have made any quantity of it. He was intimately known to, and trusted by, several of the most influential and wealthiest men of the day who would heartily have welcomed his co-operation in their activities. Yet he put aside all thoughts of his own enrichment, spent his own small savings, and sacrificed his health unsparingly, in a fight from which he could personally win nothing. Why?

Some men spend themselves for love of gain, some

for love of a woman, some for worship of an ideal. Moberly Bell was of this last small class of men who will sacrifice themselves, and all that belongs to them, in the service of an ideal. In his eyes *The Times* was not a newspaper, owned by a private partnership, and run in the financial interests of an hereditary family. *The Times* was a sacred trust committed to his charge by the people of England. At the bottom of his heart he did not care a rap for private property in a public trust such as he conceived *The Times* to be. I fancy that Buckle, and his colleagues in the Editor's Room, shared this view of Bell's, though they may not have been prepared to put their view into words quite so crudely as I have done. I am sure that none of those, upon whom depended the preservation in journalism of the traditions of *The Times*, regarded the newspaper as a property to be bought and sold as one buys or sells a soap factory. Moberly Bell realised, years before the crisis in the fortunes of the newspaper became acute, that his withdrawal—voluntary or enforced—would have precipitated the crisis and left the shattered pieces of the greatest newspaper in the world to be scrambled for by competing interests to whom a newspaper was either a means of gain or an engine of propaganda. That would have meant the end of *The Times* and all that it stood for, and the end of all those devoted servants of *The Times* of whom Bell himself was the chief guardian. So it came about that the notion of giving up, of abandoning the ungrateful struggle, never entered Bell's head. To have done so, merely that he

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might secure his own comfort or gain, would have seemed to him to be the foulest treachery. He had come to regard himself not as the servant of Mr. Walter, and of the proprietors whom he represented, but as the servant and trustee of *The Times* as an entity wholly apart from its nominal owners. I do not think that at any time during the later stages of his battle for the life of *The Times* he would have accepted dismissal by Mr. Walter. He would have defied and fought Mr. Walter as he defied and fought him in January, 1908, when his dismissal was announced to the world though never communicated directly to himself. Though, until that moment, Moberly Bell had always been a faithful servant to Mr. Walter, the deep ineradicable loyalty of his soul was given, not to any Governing Proprietor, but to *The Times* itself and to his colleagues of *The Times*.

For years before the final collision came between Mr. Walter and his co-partners, and between Moberly Bell and the two Walter brothers, the end was in sight. Bell saw it clearly. He had with unfailing courage and resource pushed his Sisyphean stone up the hill, yet always it had come slipping back upon him. The profits on the sales of the Ninth and Tenth Editions of the 'E.B.' had staved off the worst perils of the late 'nineties and of the early years of this century, and had enabled Bell to accept reforms on the editorial side which would earlier have frightened him to authorise. The circulation scheme of 1904—with its reduced price to annual subscribers—had run for twelve months and

then shown plain signs of failure. Though many new subscribers had come in, most of those who took advantage of the lower price were old readers who simply cost Bell's sales revenue eighteen shillings a head per year without conferring upon him any compensating advantage. What was more serious, the entrants of 1904 did not try to renew their subscriptions in the expected and desired volume. Then the Book Club project, though it had been successful in providing increased sales of *The Times*, had involved heavy costs per head in the Book Club subsidy, and after twelve months had involved *The Times* and the Club in a disastrous war with booksellers and publishers. So long as the entanglement of the Book Club and the Book War continued it was not possible for Moberly Bell to devise any new schemes either for raising funds or for attracting fresh readers.

Beneath the uneasy surface upon which Bell had to construct all his temporary edifices was rumbling a volcanic storm while yet the blasts of the Book War were buffeting the latest fabric which he had so laboriously been erecting. To lay foundations upon volcanic tufa is a notoriously hazardous enterprise; Bell did not build upon crumbling soil for choice but because the constitution of *The Times* offered him no alternative. The private partnership was always his basis—it owned the copyright of *The Times*—and now that private partnership was cracking and splitting. Presently under his feet a chasm would yawn.

That association of private partners which owned

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The Times, as a newspaper, and owned nothing else, may have been forgotten by readers of the preceding chapters. Those partners were not incorporated or organised in any way. Each partner had the rights and liabilities of every other partner, and no partner, or group of partners however strong, could afford to ignore others in the partnership however insignificant and scattered they might seem to be. The Head of the Walter Family, who had for nearly a hundred years been Governing Proprietor and Hereditary Manager, concentrated in his own person the powers of the partners to manage and control *The Times*, but he could not relieve his fellow-partners of their joint and several liabilities in *The Times*, nor prevent them from asserting their rights to have the partnership dissolved or reorganised. The two Walter brothers—Mr. Walter and Godfrey Walter—jointly owned the buildings known as Printing House Square and were paid rent by *The Times* for the use of those buildings. The brothers owned also the printing business which under contract printed *The Times*. But these brothers did not own *The Times*, did not even own a very large proportion of the shares into which *The Times* proprietorship had come in three generations to be divided and split up. They were liable to be pulled up by their co-partners at any moment, and compelled to submit to any order which the Court of Chancery might see fit to make in regard to the partnership. The continued existence of this private partnership was fatal to the continuance of *The Times*. Long years before it should

have been dissolved and turned into a private limited company incorporated with clearly defined powers and responsibilities under the Companies Acts. The Walters might have brought about this incorporation at almost any time; they shrank from doing so, and did not accept the necessity until acceptance was forced upon them. They seem to have remained in the mistaken belief that the Walters owned *The Times* for at least a generation after the Walters had ceased to be the owners.

The partnership after the death of the First John Walter in 1812 rapidly split up into fragments. The founder of *The Times* had retained to himself eight of the original sixteenths into which the proprietorship had been divided. But after the dispositions by will of the First, Second and Third John Walters, the Fourth Walter in succession—Arthur Fraser Walter, whose elder brother John had been drowned at Bear Wood—possessed in his own right no more than two-sixteenths as compared with his great-grandfather's eight-sixteenths. Mr. Arthur Walter possessed the largest single holding in the partnership: that was all. It was this comparatively small interest possessed by the Walter brothers in the ownership of *The Times*—as distinct from their complete ownership of the buildings and of the printing business—which diverted their attention from *The Times* as a property, and caused them to concentrate their interests upon the printing business and on the buildings. For *The Times* might be losing money—or, at

least, not making money—without immediate hurt to the revenues which they drew from their printing business and from their buildings. How they can have expected their co-partners in *The Times* as a newspaper to have remained passively content with this situation I have never been able to comprehend. Moberly Bell, when I occasionally spoke to him about the constitution, used to shrug his shoulders. He had long since abandoned the task, hopeless even for him, of seeking to bend the minds of the Walters from their hereditary fixed idea that they owned *The Times* and everything appertaining to it. We have to do, then, with a fixed idea: that the Walters were *The Times* and that *The Times* could be operated and disposed of by the Walters in such manner as they might think fit. It took the Court of Chancery eight months to eliminate this fixed idea. It was not until the long Walter reign was over that I learned—Moberly Bell was too faithful to tell me everything earlier—how much that fixed idea of theirs had handicapped *The Times* all through those grievous years of Bell's struggle to preserve its life.

The action in the Chancery Division of 'Sibley v. Walter,' which was destined to gather importance until it ended the Walter control over the destinies of *The Times*, was first set down in 1905. It looked at the beginning like the challenge of a very small David addressed to a very large Goliath. Dr. Sibley was the smallest partner among the hundred or so partners which after the divisions of three generations constituted *The Times* proprietorship. Mr. Walter was the

largest partner, and was besides Governing Proprietor. Dr. Sibley, and those who were associated with him, asked at first for very little, and would have been content with very little. They wanted to see some accounts of revenue and expenditure, and to be relieved of the indefinite liabilities of an unincorporated partnership. Had the intervention been welcomed as a convenient occasion for the ending of an outworn partnership, and the incorporation of a company in its place, the subsequent history of *The Times* might have been widely different from that which we know. But no company, representative of the interests of the partners, would have endured the Walter printing business, and the Walters were not prepared to abandon their hereditary business. Ultimately it was taken from them, and they received a mess of pottage in compensation for the loss of it. In 1905 they might have secured generous terms for its abandonment.

During 1906 the action of 'Sibley v. Walter' simmered. Negotiations went on between the parties, and at last, towards the end of the year—after the Book War had broken out—an agreement was reached which was announced publicly in the Court of Chancery on December 5th to Mr. Justice Parker. Counsel for Dr. Sibley was careful to explain that the Book War had nothing to do with the action—which was quite true; the action began before the Book Club came into existence—and that what the Sibley group chiefly desired was the incorporation of a private limited company with Mr. Walter as Governing Director. All were agreed

that whoever conducted *The Times* on behalf of the proprietors must have full power and control. Two enquiries were asked for. One into the identity of the partners and the extent of their holdings, particulars which no one seemed to have except, possibly, Mr. Walter's solicitors. The second inquiry was concerning the assets, property, and effects of the partnership. The partners do not appear to have realised that they owned no assets except the copyright of *The Times* as a newspaper and the leases of some offices, and no property or effects except cash in the bank, money due to the newspaper for sales and advertisements, and the current stocks of white paper! Everything solid and tangible belonged to the Walter brothers. Finally the plaintiff asked for accounts showing receipts and payments since June 30th, 1900. Counsel for Mr. Walter agreed to all these requests, and the speeches on both sides as reported in *The Times* read much like the cautious deliverances of the Bar at an action for collusive divorce. The plaintiff, through his counsel, was careful to emphasise that dissolution of partnership was not asked for; merely a sale to a private limited company with Mr. Walter as Governing Director. That was in December, 1906.

Eight months later, on July 31st, 1907, the parties appeared again before a Judge of the Chancery Division. Those months had seen a great change come over the temper of the plaintiff and his associated partners. The Book War had mauled the prestige of *The Times* until it had become the draggled remnant of what it

had been in the previous December, and the accounts for which the partners had asked, and which they had obtained, must have revealed the high costs of printing with which *The Times* had for years been burdened. It was a simple matter for any person skilled in newspaper production to take *The Times*, estimate what it would cost to set and print with modern machinery, and then to compare those estimates with the actual charges. Kennedy Jones did this a few months later, and I have seen the results. They were calculated to turn the agreeable purrings of December, 1906, into the resolute demands of July, 1907. David (Dr. Sibley) now asked for a dissolution of partnership and a sale of *The Times*, and Goliath (Mr. Walter) could no longer resist the demand. The partnership was dissolved by the Court forthwith, and the assets, property, and effects were ordered to be sold with the approbation of the Judge, any party to be at liberty to apply in Chambers in regard to such sale. Meanwhile Mr. Walter was directed to carry on, to collect and get in debts due and other assets. That judicial order of July 31st, 1907, of which few heard at the time, was the death warrant of the Walter constitution of *The Times*.

I should make clear that at this moment in July, 1907, when *The Times* was ordered to be sold "with the approbation of the Judge," there was no desperate necessity for a sale arising out of financial embarrassments. The dissolution of the partnership arose through the refusal of a section of the partners to bear any

longer the burdens and liabilities of their partnership. They were fully entitled to ask for relief, and the Court granted what they asked. Once dissolution had been directed by the Court an order for sale followed as a matter of course. *The Times* was no bankrupt concern put up to public auction for what it might fetch. At the moment when the order of July 31st was made the revenue of *The Times* both from sales and advertisements was larger than it had been for many years; and though the Book Club subsidy of so much per head per subscriber-member was a heavy drain, the astute bargain made by Bell with Hooper and Jackson threw the losses of the Book War on to their shoulders. The stock of the Book Club belonged to Hooper and Jackson, and if they made miscalculations over its disposal that was their look-out, not Bell's. He gave them all the help that he could in the controversy with booksellers and publishers, and so far as the public was concerned it was a contest between *The Times* and the opponents of the Book Club; yet the financial responsibility of *The Times* was all through limited to the subsidy per head of Book Club members. *The Times* was not sold because it was no longer able to carry on; it was sold because a dissolution of the owning partnership forced a sale upon it.

The first step taken by Moberly Bell was to consult with Horace Hooper and then to call me in. I found the pair of them discussing the preposterous expedient of amalgamating *The Times* with the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, and forming a company to own and

conduct the two properties. For a short time Bell was quite set upon this scheme. It accorded with his now settled conviction that *The Times* conducted upon its traditional lines with its immensely costly Foreign News service—which appealed to but a small section of the public—could not be continued unless it were subsidised by revenues from sources other than its own sales and advertisements. His experiences ever since 1898, when the association with the firm of Hooper and Jackson had begun, confirmed him in this forlorn estimate of the earning power of a first-class newspaper. I could not very well tell him that *The Times*, even after the very considerable reforms that had been introduced, still lacked many of the requirements of a first-class newspaper. It was still set by the obsolete Kastenbein machine, still printed with an Inner and an Outer Sheet, still so irregularly made up that regular faithful readers howled with exasperation whenever they tried to find the columns which they sought. I could not put into blunt words the conspicuous fact that *The Times* of 1907 was not worth threepence a day to readers who could get *The Daily Telegraph* or *The Morning Post* for one penny daily. Bell was a man of matchless courage and of inexhaustible resource, yet he was not a fully equipped newspaper administrator. Had he controlled the printing business of the Walters he would quickly have discovered much of what he did not learn until after that printing business had been abolished.

Moberly Bell in search of a subsidy for *The Times*,

and Horace Hooper in search of a permanent home in England for his *Encyclopædia Britannica*, came together for a few weeks over this project of amalgamation. I assisted Hooper to draft a prospectus of the company which proposed to take over the combined properties and then discussed with Hartley Withers the prospects of a public appeal for working capital. Withers liked the scheme as little as I did. Nevertheless he submitted it in confidence to a leading stockbroker, skilled in Home issues, and enquired whether the public might be expected to subscribe to an issue of preference shares. The opinion of this authority was markedly adverse, a good deal to our relief. Horace Hooper was choked off, for it appeared that he was unwilling to finance *The Times* himself, and both Bell and Mr. Walter were wholly averse from *The Times* being financed by the American firm of Hooper and Jackson. So the amalgamation fell through. I wish that I had kept a copy of that prospectus; it would form a most interesting item in my museum of Printing House Square relics. The contrast which it revealed between the profit-earning power of a publication like the 'E.B.'—'boosted' by the methods of Hooper—and a publication like *The Times* was rather startling. So far as my recollection serves, the 'E.B.,' exclusive of the American copyright—which Hooper proposed to retain for his firm—earned as many pounds in a year as *The Times* did shillings. This story has some bearing upon what I have written above about the financial circumstances of *The Times* at the date when the partnership

which owned its copyright was dissolved, and it was ordered by the Court to be sold. The newspaper was then making a small profit even after charging the revenue with the Book Club subsidy. It was plain that relieved of the obsolete printing business, and equipped with modern type-casting and printing machinery of its own, *The Times* was capable still of facing the financial future. The quicksands which had threatened it a few years before had receded. *The Times* was in a better financial position in July of 1907 when ordered to be sold than it was in March of 1908 when it was purchased by the Northcliffe interests.

CHAPTER XVII

A PALACE REVOLUTION

ON the morning of Tuesday, January 7th, 1908, Moberly Bell—who had gone to Dover to meet his daughter—opened a copy of *The Times* and was astounded to read the following announcement upon the leader page. It was as complete a shock and surprise to him as it was to the staff of *The Times* and to the regular readers of that newspaper:—

Negotiations are in progress whereby it is contemplated that *The Times* newspaper shall be formed into a limited company under the proposed chairmanship of Mr. Walter.

The newspaper, as heretofore, will be published at Printing House Square.

The business management will be reorganised by Mr. C. Arthur Pearson, the proposed managing director.

The editorial character of the paper will remain unchanged and will be conducted, as in the past, on lines independent of party politics.

The contemplated arrangements will, in all probability, require the sanction of the Court before they become definitive.

Moberly Bell, I say, read that extraordinary notice for the first time that Tuesday morning. He who had been for eighteen years the responsible Assistant Manager to Mr. Walter, the Governing Proprietor, had not been favoured with a word about the "contemplated arrangements" for the new company or been warned of his contemplated supersession in the business management by Mr. C. Arthur Pearson.

This notice which appeared in *The Times* of January 7th was handed to Buckle late on the previous evening with instructions from Mr. Walter to put it into the following day's paper. To Buckle, and to all in the Editor's Room, it was a bolt from the blue. In some annoyance Buckle at once wrote a letter to Moberly Bell reproaching him for keeping secret from himself, as Editor, proceedings so momentous. He naturally assumed that Bell must have known all about the negotiations. When he learned that in fact Bell knew nothing, that the whole business had been conducted behind his back, Buckle was not less shocked and astonished than Bell himself had been.

The secrecy of the Pearson negotiations may be explained, though the manner of their public announcement can never be condoned. It may be conceded that the Walters were entitled to enter into any negotiations for the reorganisation of *The Times* which seemed good to them, yet nothing can excuse the sudden public notice, without any previous warning whatsoever to a man in Bell's position.

One is glad to be able to hold Mr. Walter blameless

of more than a weak concurrence at the last moment. He was ill at the time, and in authorising the announcement did not appreciate its full significance. The Pearson scheme was the work of Godfrey Walter, part-owner and manager of the Walter Printing Business. Between Godfrey Walter, as representing the printing contract, and Moberly Bell, as devoted to the service of *The Times* as a newspaper, official relations could never be cordial. To Bell the printing business was a burden beyond his strength to carry; to Godfrey Walter Moberly Bell was an upstart Grand Vizier who had gathered into his own hands the reins of power which should, in his view, have been controlled by the Walters. So when Godfrey Walter negotiated the Pearson agreement, which he believed would restore the old authority of the Walters and eliminate the great figure of the too powerful Moberly Bell, he observed the closest secrecy, and was especially careful that neither Bell nor Buckle should hear a word about it until finality had been achieved. When he conceived the moment ripe for a crushing declaration he obtained his brother's authority for the public announcement.

The announcement, which I have quoted above, was intended by Godfrey Walter to be a declaration of war against Moberly Bell. It was not so intended by Mr. Walter, who never appears to have admitted that it was a public dismissal of Moberly Bell from *The Times*. So little was this aspect of the affair realised by the Governing Proprietor that he did not then, or at any time later, communicate direct with Bell. He never

gave Bell the notice, to which he was entitled, of the contemplated termination of his engagement as 'Assistant Manager.' He somehow reconciled to himself the prospect of Arthur Pearson as Managing Director with the continued existence of Moberly Bell as the *de facto* Manager which he had been since 1890. Furious as Bell justly was, and willingly as he snatched up the gage of battle thrown down by Godfrey Walter, he was much less angry with Mr. Walter than one might have expected. He determined at once that the Walter control should be ended, if it were in his power to end it, yet he treated Mr. Walter with sympathetic indulgence rather than with acute hostility. He instantly resolved to smash the 'Pearson plot,' as he called it, and to eject Godfrey Walter from Printing House Square, but all through the fight which followed his relations with Mr. Walter remained ostensibly those which they had been for years past. He realised, more keenly than anyone else, how grievously Mr. Walter himself had suffered and how broken in health and spirit he had become.

There was, however, this fundamental change in Bell's relations with his titular Chief. Hitherto Bell had always submitted his plans to Mr. Walter before putting them into operation. Now he thrust Mr. Walter completely on one side, and proceeded with his campaign against the Pearson agreement as if the Governing Proprietor had abdicated his hereditary functions. I therefore had the privilege of seeing Bell, the publicly dismissed Manager of *The Times*, carrying

on all his negotiations for the sale of *The Times* and for its future reorganisation from the chair of the Manager's Room and with all the weight and authority of his status of Manager. Moberly Bell, in effect, superseded Mr. Walter, by force of his own personality; he made his own plans and fought his own fight, and at the end offered—with the gesture of “take it or leave it”—the acceptance of all that he had determined to carry through. Within twenty-four hours of the publication of the Pearson notice a silent Palace Revolution on the old French model had been effected. The hereditary sovereign was quietly deposed and Moberly Bell, Mayor of the Palace, ruled in his stead. From that moment Mr. Walter could not contend with his formidable subordinate, and had no choice but to accept the conditions and the rôle which Moberly Bell laid down for him. The alliance with Lord Northcliffe was Bell's work and Bell's alone; Mr. Walter knew nothing of it until near the end and was in no respect responsible for it.

The situation as it developed in Printing House Square was starkly impossible. Yet it seemed to me at the time so natural, indeed so inevitable, that it was not until months had passed that I began to appreciate the richness of its humorous features. Down came Moberly Bell bristling in rage like some furious wolf eager to fall upon and slaughter both the Walter brothers, yet finding no one with whom to give battle. He had expected to receive a letter from the Governing Proprietor terminating his own engagement as Assistant

Manager. He received no such letter, neither then nor at any time. He sought for Mr. Walter that he might demand a personal explanation, but Mr. Walter was not to be found. The Governing Proprietor had gone to Ramsgate to recover strength after a bout of influenza, and Godfrey Walter, entrenched on the far side of the buildings, did not venture within range of Bell's guns. So Bell, laughing for the first time since he had read at Dover that notice in *The Times*, plumped himself down in the Manager's chair and proceeded to carry on with the ordinary business of the paper as if nothing had happened. Presently I turned up, anxious for information. I found Bell singularly cheerful, in the circumstances. He saw the greatest fight of his career opening out before him, and his eyes glittered with the lust of battle. I think that on that first morning it was fortunate for Bell's later schemes that he did not come into personal collision with either of the Walter brothers. With his pugnacious zest for war Bell could scarcely have avoided a definite official split, which would have made it impossible for him to have conducted his future operations from the office of *The Times*.

"What are you going to do about this Pearson business?" I asked.

"Smash it," replied Bell.

He had no doubt of his power to smash it, and I had no doubt. No one on the editorial side of *The Times* seemed to have any doubt of the ultimate issue. Moberly Bell, hitherto regarded by many as a Beast,

sprang into instant popularity. The public affront to which he had been subjected brought all men over to his side, and we offered him our fullest sympathy and all our support, for what it might be worth. Everyone to whom I spoke was perfectly confident that Bell would come out a winner. Somehow—I have no notion how—word had gone round the Square that his real opponent was Godfrey Walter, whom many on the editorial side scarcely knew even by sight.

An apocryphal legend sprang up, and passed rapidly from mouth to ear, which, though unhappily it was not true, illustrated the respect which Moberly Bell's indomitable pluck had gained for him throughout the staff. The story was that when Bell was first shown by Buckle the Pearson notice he turned white, and then laughed. "Perhaps," said he gaily, "they will keep me on as Limerick Editor."

A study of history suggests that hereditary sovereigns during their years of decline never become conscious that power and prestige are slipping from them. Only when revolution strikes them from their thrones do they awake to the realities of existence. They pass their lives in the false atmosphere of a Court in which harsh daily truths are not told. So it was with this hereditary Walter control of *The Times*. When it went, it went suddenly and finally, and the man by whom it was destroyed—all unwittingly—was not Moberly Bell but Godfrey Walter.

Godfrey Walter to most of the editorial night staff was little more than a name; to many of those who had

actually met him he remained little more than a phantom. He strode about the office by day and never appeared to exchange small civilities with those who crossed his path. For years, whenever I happened to encounter him, he looked through me and passed me by. When later I did have official relations with him in the printing business he was always civil and tried to be helpful. So maybe that unseeing progress of his through the office sprang from shyness rather than from pride of station. It made the worst of impressions, whatever may have been the cause of it.

For a day or two after the Pearson notice had been published Godfrey Walter seemed to shrink aside as one approached him. He must have been conscious of the atmosphere of hostility with which he was surrounded. I did my best to avoid contact with him, but one evening he met me in the passage near his room and stopped me. He asked if I would mind coming in for a few minutes. Of course I went. Sitting under the bright light he looked a very sick man. A year or so before he had been given up for dead after an attack of influenza and its complications, and recovery had been slow. Now to his evident ill health was added a nervous diffidence. He knew that I, a man notoriously devoted to Moberly Bell, must be bitterly hostile to himself and his schemes, yet as the relations between us had in the recent past been officially friendly, he was smitten with a desire to soften my enmity. The interview, at his request, could have had no other purpose.

"I am afraid," he began, "that the staff think that Mr. Pearson is coming here to control *The Times*."

I replied that we did not welcome Mr. Pearson's presence in any capacity.

"You don't understand," he went on eagerly. "Let me explain to you and then you can make the new situation clear to your colleagues. The new company will not be controlled in any way by Mr. Pearson. Mr. Walter will be the chairman and I shall be a director. Mr. Pearson will simply be one of the board who will advise us on the management side. I assure you that *The Times* will remain under the control of the Walters, under *our* control, just as it is now. Do please make it plain to everyone of the staff that there will be no change in the Walter control."

I stared at him, speechless. What he had just said added yet one more incredible factor to a situation which bristled with the unbelievable and the impossible. Even now Mr. Godfrey Walter evidently held to the family belief that his name was one to inspire confidence and devotion in the staff at Printing House Square. I had not the heart to explain that the Walters in Printing House Square in January, 1908, were hereditary sovereigns from whom their former subjects had revolted as inevitably and irretrievably as had the English people from the later Stuarts. Mr. Godfrey Walter would no more have understood that his family régime was dead than James II. ever understood that his line of English rulers was dead. I could not tell him that, much as the public supersession of Moberly

Bell by Arthur Pearson revolted us, we would sooner be ruled by an undiluted Pearson than submit any longer to the old order.

He continued in the same strain for a few minutes and then I left him. My intention at first was to recount what had passed to Moberly Bell; yet, upon reflection, I refrained. He would have laughed, and I should have laughed with him. But the hereditary mind, revealed so ingenuously, was too pitiful to be made an occasion for ribald laughter. I also felt too grateful to Mr. Godfrey Walter to laugh at him, for as I came away from Number One any doubts about the ultimate issue, which I might still have uneasily entertained, wholly left me.

CHAPTER XVIII

LORD NORTHCLIFFE CROSSES THE CHANNEL

No dynasty of newspaper controllers who sought to retain their power could have made a worse blunder than to force upon the Editor the publication of that Pearson notice. Its appearance ruined them. It instantly turned Moberly Bell from a faithful servant into a formidable enemy. The Walters ranged against themselves a fighting man of dauntless courage and limitless resource, one, too, whose personality dominated those with whom he was brought into close contact. Men might dislike him, even hate him, yet they could not but be impressed by him. Had the Walters in fact owned a major share in *The Times* proprietorship—I have explained that they did not own more than a small proportion—their defeat might have been more difficult to achieve though not less inevitable. In a private partnership all partners, small or great, are as one in the eyes of the Court of Chancery. It was this basic circumstance which had been ignored, and also that the dissolution of the partnership had already been ordered, and that the future of *The Times* and the manner of its sale rested no longer with the Walters



Photo. by Hebbel

LORD NORTHCLEFFE

but with Mr. Justice Warrington of the Chancery Division. The publication of the Pearson notice not only drove Moberly Bell into implacable hostility, but offended the Judge and the Court within whose impartial jurisdiction rested the terms and conditions of any sale.

Those were two of the consequences, both adverse, which sprang from the public announcement of Godfrey Walter's plans. There was yet another, and one which was to become of the highest importance. Among the few readers of *The Times* who welcomed the Pearson announcement was Alfred Harmsworth, Lord Northcliffe, who had made up his mind to buy *The Times* if it could be brought about. Nothing suited him better than that Godfrey Walter and Mr. Arthur Pearson should have come out into the open in such a clumsy fashion. He is reported to have encouraged the publication by associating Mr. Pearson's name with that of *The Times* in newspapers under his own control. This extremely astute newspaper proprietor, Lord Northcliffe, looked upon the ownership of *The Times* as the coping stone to be placed upon his accumulation of newspaper properties, but he had no intention of paying more for it than he could help. The more *The Times* could be cheapened before he intervened the more cheaply he would be enabled to buy it. Arthur Pearson, in his view, was an ideal competitor. He was as much inferior to Lord Northcliffe in ability and repute as he was inferior to Lord Northcliffe in the instant command of cash in large

volume. Arthur Pearson was already involved with *The Standard* and had at no time in his career made money as Alfred Harmsworth had made it. When it came to a competition before the Court of Chancery of cash against cash Arthur Pearson had little to offer the existing partners save shares in a hypothetical new company, whereas Lord Northcliffe, or his representatives, could put up solid gold pounds in any necessary quantity. No Court, settling the affairs of a dissolved partnership, would hesitate between pounds sterling ready to be paid into Court and visionary shares in a company which had as yet no legal existence. The Court would, of course, plump for cash down in the interests of any partners who might wish to be bought out in cash.

The mistake of premature publication was one which Lord Northcliffe, then in his prime, would never have made himself. He saw clearly that whoever wanted a smooth passage in purchasing *The Times* must keep hidden in the background. There must be no disclosure of the identity of the purchaser. He must put forward well-known members of the staff of *The Times* as the ostensible movers in the scheme of purchase and as directors in the new company, and employ the Walter name both as a screen and as a public assurance of continuity in management. These points in the campaign Lord Northcliffe kept steadily before his mind. He had no intention at all of butting in and presenting to the public the exciting spectacle—exceedingly damaging to the future repute of *The Times*—of direct

competition between himself and Mr. Pearson for the property of the late partners. He had also determined that the purchase by himself of the copyright in the newspaper, if and when it secured the approbation of the Court of Chancery, should be accompanied by an ending of the Walter printing contract. Both the amount which he was prepared to offer for the copyright, and the terms which he proposed for buying out the printing business, were settled in his own mind before he made any overt move. His first essential requirement was some one high up in *The Times* hierarchy with whom, and behind whom, he might marshal his financial forces. The Pearson announcement came as a godsend to him. For it drove Moberly Bell into war with the Walters and instantly suggested Moberly Bell to Lord Northcliffe as the man whose ability and position made him an ideal collaborator. So long as Bell owed loyalty to the Walters he would not have looked at Lord Northcliffe, but from the moment when they themselves broke publicly with him he came within the possible field of Lord Northcliffe's operations.

Whenever Lord Northcliffe wanted to work unseen he rather ostentatiously went abroad for reasons of health. Whether he was actually in Paris when the Pearson announcement was made I am not quite sure. He was certainly there a day or two later. For he put himself into communication with Horace Hooper, Moberly Bell's chief associate in the *Encyclopædia* and the Book Club, and exactly a week after the Pearson

disclosure, on January 14th, he crossed the Channel and came to London. In every move the contrast between Lord Northcliffe and Arthur Pearson was clearly to be seen. From first to last Lord Northcliffe made no mistakes, every step was carefully thought out in the mind of this master organiser, and no detail of importance escaped his attention. Mr. Arthur Pearson made, or permitted to be made, every kind of mistake, and from the moment when his great rival began to lay his parallels ceased to count in the campaign.

I do not think that Moberly Bell had seriously begun to look to Lord Northcliffe as a possible ally in his fight with Godfrey Walter until he was approached by Horace Hooper. He must have thought of this outstanding personality in Fleet Street, but, at first, he must have regarded the plan of bringing in Lord Northcliffe to abolish Arthur Pearson as rather like the famous exploit of our forefathers of calling in the Saxons to oust the Danish pirates. It was, one must confess, an operation rather like jumping out of the frying-pan into the fire in order to escape from being burnt. Bell was exceedingly secretive at this period even with me. He would discuss possible methods of forming a company free from Walter control without clearly indicating his own views. One scheme with which he toyed was to bring in Lord Cromer—an old and intimate friend—as Chairman and to buy out *The Times* partners with money obtained from big houses in the City. He mentioned the Rothschilds to me as possible suppliers of cash. I do not think that he

actually proposed a plan of purchase to Lord Rothschild, for I told him of an earlier experience of my own. I had cast myself for the part of owner and editor of one of the leading Sunday papers, and discussed the matter with Lord Rothschild. He then told me most positively that it was a matter of settled policy in New Court not to acquire interests in any newspaper property whatever. The Rothschilds had assisted Moberly Bell to buy the lease of the Book Club premises, but this was as an ordinary investment on terminable mortgage in Oxford Street and not in any way as a newspaper investment.

The approach to Moberly Bell by Horace Hooper on behalf of Lord Northcliffe occurred on or about January 15th. Hooper himself told me of it, and both Moberly Bell and Lord Northcliffe told me of the interview which followed. Hooper went to Bell and said, "Why not see Alfred Harmsworth; he might be willing to help you." Bell demurred, but after some pressing by Hooper consented to be led to some inconspicuous neutral territory where Lord Northcliffe was waiting for him.

"Mr. Bell," said Lord Northcliffe, as soon as Hooper had left them together, "I am going to buy *The Times*. With your help if you will give it to me; in spite of you if you withhold your assistance."

"I will help you," replied Moberly Bell.

Both these men, when telling me afterwards of their first interview, used practically the same words. Each of them was deeply impressed by the directness of the

other. "I had heard many stories unfavourable to Moberly Bell," said Lord Northcliffe to me, "and I expected to be unfavourably impressed by him. I was surprised to find that he was quite unlike his reputation, as told to me. I expected him to be shifty; he was straightness itself. I expected him to make good terms for himself; he made none at all. He insisted upon terms for the editorial staff, he insisted upon making you Assistant Manager, but for himself he asked nothing at all."

Moberly Bell, for his part, took to Lord Northcliffe, who was, when he chose to exert his powers, of singular personal charm. He exerted all his powers of fascination now and succeeded in removing most of Bell's doubts. Bell had insisted that the Editor and his assistants should, for a considerable time at least, be left in undisturbed control of the paper. Lord Northcliffe agreed. Bell further laid down that the high standard of *The Times* as a newspaper must be maintained as a fundamental principle, and that it must retain its complete political independence. Lord Northcliffe agreed. Then the two got down to the details of a purchase scheme and very quickly sketched out the terms which were embodied a few weeks later in the Bell-Sterling Agreement of which I will tell in my next chapter. Lord Northcliffe assured Moberly Bell—quite sincerely I am convinced—that he had no object in purchasing *The Times* if it were not to be maintained at its high level and improved in every feasible way, regardless of expense. He told Bell, as he subsequently

told me, that he was a "colossally rich man" who had made so much money that he cared little for it; he was not buying *The Times* to make more money out of it but in order that it might become again the best as well as the first newspaper in the world.

To some it may seem strange that Moberly Bell, so bitterly hostile to any connection with Arthur Pearson, should have lent himself to the purchase by Lord Northcliffe, a personage far more likely to dominate the fortunes of *The Times* than Arthur Pearson ever was. One must allow something for the circumstances. The Pearson scheme had been put forward as an open act of war against Bell himself and he could not be expected to have any truck with it. The manner of its announcement made him its bitterest enemy. The Pearson scheme was to his mind out of consideration. Time was short. The partnership had been dissolved nearly six months earlier, and at any moment some wealthy financial group might come forward with an offer to purchase on terms which the Court must consider seriously. As between an outside group who sought control of *The Times* merely that they might exploit it in their own interests, and a purchaser like Lord Northcliffe, he was wholly on the side of Lord Northcliffe. He saw clearly the dangers of bringing in this strange wayward Irish genius of a professional newspaper proprietor, yet he believed that the danger to the future repute of *The Times* was less under Lord Northcliffe than under anyone else who was in sight at the moment. Bell did not know at that time of a

project to purchase *The Times* which would have impelled him to instant action. The 'German Syndicate,' as we called it—though it was not really German—revealed its presence later. At the moment when Bell made his choice it was Pearson or Northcliffe, and Bell without hesitation threw all his weight and influence on the side of Lord Northcliffe.

In this choice I venture to hold that Moberly Bell was right. Whatever faults and disabilities Lord Northcliffe might reveal as proprietor of *The Times*—and they afterwards became considerable—he was at any rate in the first rank at his job. He has been described as a "Genius without a Soul;" men may disagree about Lord Northcliffe's soul, but they cannot disagree about his possession of outstanding genius. He had come into Fleet Street as a young man without money or influence and, within a short ten years, he had stood Fleet Street on its head. It requires genius of a sort, and of a remarkable sort, to perform so startling a feat. It might be, and was, highly perilous to the traditions of *The Times* for the newspaper to come under the control of Lord Northcliffe, yet there was nothing derogatory to the position of *The Times* in a Northcliffe ownership. Mr. Arthur Pearson, in his blindness, grew into a singularly beautiful figure. He triumphed over his own deprivation of sight with admirable patience and courage, and during the war he was the patron saint of the blinded warriors. With us to-day Arthur Pearson personifies the noble work of St. Dunstan's. But Mr. Arthur Pearson in 1908 was no more

than a third-rate newspaper proprietor with whom *The Times* could not have been associated without suffering the gravest loss of dignity and repute. Of the three newspaper figures of their day—Alfred Harmsworth, George Newnes, and Arthur Pearson—Mr. Pearson stood lowest, and far the lowest. In his newspapers, magazines, and weekly journals he originated nothing. Why Godfrey Walter ever pitched upon Arthur Pearson as the future ‘managing director’ must remain a mystery. When later Moberly Bell asked this question of Mr. Walter he could extract no answer. “It was Godfrey,” replied Mr. Walter rather miserably. “He told me that Mr. Pearson was a very clever man.” I realise that neither of the Walter brothers comes very well out of this story of their troubles and projects. That was less their fault than their misfortune. They were country gentlemen, with the training and tastes and disabilities of their class. By inheritance they had become responsible for the greatest newspaper in the world at a period of intense crisis. Of course they were not equal to their task. Any other two country gentlemen untrained in business, and with no special aptitude for newspaper management—members of that perilous fourth generation in hereditary business—would have fared just as badly. Hereditary ownership and control may be applicable to some classes of human enterprise; for a great newspaper nothing could be less appropriate or more certainly fatal.

CHAPTER XIX

MOBERLY BELL AS CONSPIRATOR

THE lovely sight of Moberly Bell in the rôle of conspirator during those weeks of January and February, 1908, is among my most delectable remembrances. He entered so thoroughly into the spirit of the game and enjoyed every minute of it so whole-heartedly. His interview with Lord Northcliffe on or about January the 15th was kept the closest of secrets. Some days later Lord Northcliffe desired a second meeting with Bell and was greatly worried how to bring it about without attracting attention to himself. The first meeting, as I have told, was contrived by Horace Hooper. Lord Northcliffe telephoned to Mrs. Bell, seeking her aid, and she communicated with her husband at *The Times* office in *Arabic*. Gorgeous! Bell was chuckling to himself when I next saw him. "You wouldn't think," said he, "that I have been carrying on negotiations in *Arabic*! I was doing it only this morning." Lord Northcliffe's name was never mentioned between us, and I am told that it was never mentioned at Bell's house in Park Crescent. To me Bell spoke of 'Him' or 'He.' I was not supposed to know who 'He' or

'Him' was, and I pretended not to know. Then when Lord Northcliffe had skipped back to France to be out of the way, and Bell and 'He' had a regular hour for calling one another by the long distance wire to Boulogne, the game became more pleasing than ever. While these talks were going on—remember that Bell all this while, Bell the publicly dismissed employee, remained at his desk in the Manager's Room at Printing House Square—while these talks were going on Bell would shut his door. One really cannot conduct a first-class conspiracy with the door open! So I felt, too, and when I visited him, which was very often, we always closed that door which for years had been accustomed to stand open. I am glad that Bell did not equip himself with the wide-brimmed hat and sombre cloak of a stage conspirator and insist upon a like costume for me, though he with his great head and curved beak would have become it mightily.

The end of the first stage in the battle against Godfrey Walter and his nominee Arthur Pearson was marked by a notice which Bell felt strong enough to insert in *The Times* of January 18th. He seized the opportunity afforded by a request from the Court of Chancery to make the legal position clear. The Pearson announcement of January 7th, 1908, inserted by the Walters behind Bell's back, had approached contempt of Court seeing that the manner and conditions of sale of the property of *The Times* partnership rested not with the Walters but with Mr. Justice Warrington of the Chancery Division. The notice of January 18th,

carefully drawn up, though in clumsy English, was intended to intimate to all whom it might concern that the last word in the purchase of *The Times* would not be spoken by Mr. Pearson and his supporters. It ran as follows :—

As some misapprehension would appear to have arisen in reference to the statement as to the future conduct of *The Times*, inserted in our issue of January 7th, we desire to call attention to the fact that such statement referred only to certain negotiations as being in progress; and further to state, as the fact is, that no sale of *The Times* has yet been effected, nor has any decision been arrived at as to the mode or terms of any such sale.

By this time the Godfrey Walter—Arthur Pearson combination had been cut out and isolated by that bold corsair Bell, and Mr. Walter, the Governing Proprietor, was in process of being detached from them and brought over to Moberly Bell's side. He was not told with whom Bell was working, he was merely informed that the Pearson project could not succeed seeing that Moberly Bell purposed to buy *The Times* himself with resources which had been placed at his disposal. Mr. Walter had been drawn unwittingly into the Pearson scheme, and was most uneasy about it; now that he had come again under the domination of the supremely confident Moberly Bell he had less taste for it than ever. He was not now, I believe, at all sorry that Bell should be set upon dragging him out again.

Bell at this time in his attitude towards Mr. Walter was greatly influenced by Lord Northcliffe. It is easy

to comprehend the view of Lord Northcliffe. He cared not a straw for Godfrey Walter and was willing that he should disappear from Printing House Square—especially as his Printing Business was going to be abolished—but he did most strongly desire to keep on friendly terms with Mr. Walter. He wanted the Walter name to be associated with *The Times* in the chairmanship of the new company. It was of the highest importance that his own name should be kept out, and that the public should have no knowledge of the identity of the actual purchasers. His purpose was to buy out the old partners in the name of Moberly Bell, and to set up a company with Mr. Walter as chairman and with the leading members of *The Times* staff as directors. His interests would then be held by nominees and there would not, so far as the public knew, be a trace of Northcliffe or Kennedy Jones about ‘*The Times Publishing Company Limited.*’ So far he had pursued the policy of camouflage with striking success. There had inevitably been some slight gossip associating his name with the pending sale of the copyright in *The Times*, yet no substance upon which gossip could feed. At this time I heard more than one man, closely connected with the Northcliffe papers, stoutly deny that the Chief—as he delighted to be called—would consent to touch *The Times* at any price, and in my character as conspirator I scoffed at the notion that *The Times* would have anything to do with Lord Northcliffe.

There now appeared upon the stage a new actor,

General John Barton Sterling, an old friend of Bell and a substantial partner in the proprietorship of *The Times*. General Sterling owned one-thirty-second part. It will be understood that under the order for sale the disposition of the property of the partners rested with the Court, and that no outsiders could put forward any scheme of purchase except through one or other of the partners. Moberly Bell, who had agreed on the terms of purchase with Lord Northcliffe, now secured the concurrence of General Sterling and entered with him into a legal contract to buy out the interests of the partners in the copyright and the interest of the Walters in their printing business. It was further agreed to lease the buildings from the Walters on specific terms. The interesting feature of this Bell-Sterling contract, which was signed on February 11th, 1908—just five weeks after the Pearson announcement had been given to the world—is that its terms were incorporated into the Memorandum and Articles of Association of *The Times* Publishing Company without any alteration of substance. The details had been so carefully worked out in the conversations between Moberly Bell and Lord Northcliffe, and in correspondence through Horace Hooper or W. M. Jackson (of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*), that no subsequent alteration became necessary. And this is the more remarkable since the Bell-Sterling agreement disposed over their heads both of the interests of the partners in *The Times* as a newspaper and of the interests of the Walters in the buildings and in their printing business. The Walter brothers, when

the battle drew to an end, had the good sense to accept the accomplished facts and to take what was offered to them.

Under the Bell-Sterling contract Moberly Bell agreed to buy out the partners in *The Times* for £320,000—in cash or in First Preference Shares in the new company at their option—to provide at least £100,000 for working capital, to lease the Printing House Square and Playhouse Yard buildings from the Walters at an annual rental of £15,000, and to compensate the Walters for the loss of their printing business by issuing to them £150,000 in Seven per cent. Second Preference Shares. Some years later these Second Preference Shares, on which no dividend had been paid, were changed into Ordinary Shares. They were a mess of pottage, an exceedingly cheap and easy means of getting rid of the perpetual printing contract which had cost the old *Times* so very dearly.

The story of that £320,000, the price at which Moberly Bell contracted with General Sterling to buy out the partners, is an attractive one; it revealed that strange creature Lord Northcliffe as a man of generous, even chivalrous, instincts. The nobility of the gesture with which he handed over that large sum of money to Moberly Bell won his heart, and won mine, too, as a devoted friend of Bell. First, in order to make definitive the contract with General Sterling, a stake of £32,000—10 per cent. of the purchase consideration—was deposited with the London and County Bank in the joint names of Bell and Sterling. Then in order that

Bell might be in a position to pay into Court the whole purchase money, if required to do so, the full sum—£320,000 in addition to the deposit of £32,000—was entrusted to him.

"Would you call me a rich man?" asked Bell one morning as I entered his room. He was smiling all over his face and half-way down his back, and looking younger than I had seen him for many months past.

"If I may judge by those securities of yours which you asked me to vet," replied I, "I should certainly not call you rich."

Bell grinned. "I am extremely rich," said he. "There are lying on deposit at the Bank of England at this moment 320,000 golden sovereigns in my name, in my sole name. I could go down with a sack, draw all that money out, and bolt with it. What do you think of that?"

"I think," replied I, "that someone—shall we say 'He'?—is convinced that you are an honest man."

"Yes," returned Bell, his fine face glowing. "He is a splendid fellow. He insisted upon depositing the money in my sole name."

Afterwards Lord Northcliffe told me how, and why, he had determined to offer this signal mark of his confidence in Moberly Bell, in defiance of his own solicitors. The obvious and proper course would have been to deposit the purchase money in the joint names of Bell and of some representative of Lord Northcliffe. "No," said Lord Northcliffe, "I would not do that. F——, my solicitors, said that I was mad. I wanted to please

old Bell and to show that I, at any rate, believed in him. He had made all sorts of conditions for *The Times* and for the staff, yet had made no conditions for himself. So I decided to make him the first Managing Director, and to hand over the purchase money to him. It was the least that I could do."

So for several weeks Bell sat in Printing House Square the possessor, as sole trustee, of his 320,000 golden sovereigns, and I who know how deeply Lord Northcliffe's action gratified my dear friend lay this story as an imperishable wreath upon Lord Northcliffe's grave. Afterwards he did many things which made the Old Guard of *The Times* lament bitterly that he had ever entered upon control; I lamented with them. Yet of the man himself I remember just this: that at a time when Moberly Bell had been cut to the heart and abandoned by those whom he trusted, Lord Northcliffe, by this chivalrous gesture of complete confidence, poured kindly oil upon Bell's wounds.

"Why £320,000?" I asked of Bell. "How did you arrive at that sum?"

"It sounded a nice round figure," replied Bell. "He did not want to pay more than he could help, and felt sure that Pearson would not be able to raise anything approaching that sum in cash. He is also going to lay down new printing plant and has undertaken to put up at least £100,000 for working capital. What is the matter with £320,000?"

"It is a very good bargain for Him," I said; "especially if most of the partners take First Preference

Shares, and he gets the greater part of his cash returned to him."

The precise number of thousands—320—was chosen because the partnership interests were divided into thirty-seconds, and could be apportioned readily in terms of this purchase money.

Moberly Bell did not greatly concern himself with the financial side of the contract; that was Lord Northcliffe's business. What did trouble him then and afterwards was how to lay down some kind of editorial Magna Carta which would prevent *The Times* from being turned into a threepenny edition of *The Daily Mail*. He was in the position of our British forebears who called in the Saxons to save them from Danish freebooters. He wanted to make terms so that the Saxons after disposing of the Danes should not proceed to eat up the indigeneal British. Most of Bell's conversations with Lord Northcliffe ranged round this problem of security for the editorial side to carry on *The Times* upon the old traditional lines. He was prepared to agree to many reforms in detail, especially on the side of the display and make-up of the news columns, though he held that reforms, however desirable in themselves, should be introduced very gradually and sparingly. He was afraid lest a vigorous and highly modern Lord Northcliffe should 'reform' the old *Times* so drastically that it would become another paper altogether. In his deep anxiety, both for the old newspaper of his mature affections and for the prerogatives of the Editor and his Assistants, he sought to tie Lord North-

cliffe down to a definite undertaking to confine his energies to the business side—to circulation, advertisements, and printing—and to keep his restless fingers off the Editor's Room. A formula, designed to be a charter of editorial continuity, was drawn up between Bell and Lord Northcliffe and embodied as an Article, first in the Bell-Sterling contract, and afterwards in the Memorandum of Association of *The Times* Publishing Company. It ran as follows:—

It shall be a fundamental principle of the Company that the efficiency, reputation and character of *The Times* newspaper shall, as far as possible, be maintained at its present high standard, and that on all existing political questions the independent attitude of the paper shall be maintained as heretofore.

Bell tried to do more than secure the insertion of this piously futile Article. It was arranged that the directors of the new company should all be members of the staff of *The Times*, Mr. Walter as Chairman being deemed to be a member of the staff. Of course these directors could have little or no real power. Behind them would stand Lord Northcliffe and his associates, holding through their nominees the bulk of the Ordinary (controlling) shares and all-powerful in the determination of policy, both management and editorial. Nevertheless, so long as the Old Guard survived—those who formed the first Board—they would have considerable influence in keeping Lord Northcliffe to the spirit and letter of the editorial charter. It never entered Bell's head—it would have seemed too improbable—that

in little more than four years the whole Board, as constituted in 1908, would have been removed by death and retirement. By the end of 1912 there was no Old Guard, all had gone, and there was no one capable of putting up effective opposition to Lord Northcliffe whatever he might choose to do.

I do not question Lord Northcliffe's sincerity at the time when he agreed with Bell upon the terms of the editorial charter. He was then full of apprehensions concerning the future of *The Times*. He did not pretend to understand it or its readers. He saw clearly what was needed to be done on the side of management—on this side he was the greatest expert living—but the editorial conduct of a newspaper like *The Times* was outside the range of his experience. He told me himself most positively that he did not wish to interfere. "I shall leave the Editor unrestricted control," said he, "unless he should—which is quite incredible—fail to warn the British people of the coming German peril. I insist upon that duty being discharged. Apart from Germany the Editor is free to take any line of policy which commends itself to him." Years before the war the imminence of the German Peril was an obsession of Lord Northcliffe, and no one now can say that he was wrong in employing his newspapers to warn the British people against it.

Moberly Bell tried to get Lord Northcliffe's acceptance to a more explicit charter than that which has been quoted above. He wished to secure, in unmistakable terms, a definition of what was meant by the mainten-

ance of the "efficiency, reputation, and character" of *The Times*. In a letter dated February 6th—five days before the date of signing the Bell-Sterling contract—he recapitulated the points upon which he had received verbal assurances from Lord Northcliffe, and concerning which he desired written confirmation. I do not think that he got that written confirmation. This letter is of much interest as revealing Bell's mind at the time when it was composed.

"There are other assurances which it is more difficult to make specific. They are assurances which I have made to colleagues and shareholders as to the future conduct of the paper referred to in Article 8 [quoted above] of the agreement with General Sterling, and I should like to be assured that I have so far as possible interpreted correctly ——'s [Northcliffe's] intentions.

"The maintenance of the efficiency, reputation and character of *The Times* I understand among other things to imply:

(a) That the main changes will be in matters relating to the mechanical production of the paper.

(b) That changes will be made in the arrangement and get-up of the paper, but that in other respects the tendency will be to fuller and more complete reports.

(c) That the paper shall remain at 3d., and shall be a 24 pp. paper.

(d) That the staff shall be under my control, and is to be treated in practically the same way as at present.

(e) That the existing distinction between news and advertisements be strictly maintained.

(f) That the paper shall avoid sensationalism, and appeal to the better educated portion of the public.

"On all these points — [Northcliffe] has already expressed to me verbally his agreement, but I should like his written confirmation, and I ask his general assurance that in character *The Times* shall be in future as thoroughly independent of party clique and individual interest as it has been in the past.

"I will only add that so important do I think it to get over any idea that *The Times* has changed, that I would advocate even avoiding changes that are expedient at first, and to make all visible changes in arrangement, etc., very gradually."

I do not think that Moberly Bell ever received the written confirmation for which he asked. His original letter—which lies before me; it was forwarded to Lord Northcliffe through a third party—concludes with this sentence: "This letter returned signed as approved would perhaps be the simplest form of acknowledgment." There is no such notification of approval upon the letter though one may have been sent separately. If it had been, however, I should probably have heard of it.

What I have given shows, at least, the understanding which Bell thought had been arrived at between himself and Lord Northcliffe, and which he expected the new proprietor to carry out. It was no fault of his that the editorial charter, both written and verbal, proved to be illusory. There is no possible means of tying down the proprietor of a newspaper to conduct it in the future

on prescribed lines. Whatever conditions may be embodied in a Memorandum of Association, in preliminary contracts, or in letters, no legal power can exist in anyone to enforce them. And to a very large extent their observance must be a matter of individual opinion. A great many of the changes introduced by Lord Northcliffe during his ten years of unrestricted control—after the disappearance of the Old Guard—were no doubt, in his view, calculated to enhance the “efficiency, reputation, and character” of *The Times*. Others, more especially the survivors of the Old Guard, might hold opposite views, and hold them violently. There was no remedy. Moberly Bell might enter into a contract to sell the body of *The Times*, but it was not within his power, or within the power of anyone, to enter into a contract whereby its spirit as he understood it might be preserved.

We have now arrived at a stage in my narrative at which it is necessary to introduce the ‘German Syndicate.’ We became conscious about the end of January that there were more than two Richmonds in the field contesting for the future possession of *The Times*. Until this new competitor emerged, the pending fight before the Court of Chancery was confined to Mr. Arthur Pearson, backed by Godfrey Walter, and Lord Northcliffe, backed by Moberly Bell. Then we learned that a group of partners had entered into negotiations with one or two wealthy men, interested in the maintenance of Free Trade, to purchase *The Times*, and to make a change in the political policy of the paper.

Since Mr. Chamberlain came forward in 1903 with his campaign in favour of Imperial Preference the Editor of *The Times* had strongly supported him. The Unionist Party was still acutely divided on Fiscal Policy, and the Free Traders since they had lost the support of *The Standard* sought to control a leading daily newspaper in London. The order for sale of *The Times* gave them an opportunity. There is no reason to doubt that the partners and outside backers who favoured this project were genuinely patriotic people—I am not going to be so brutal as to give any names—but British patriotism in 1908 was vastly less sensitive than it became in 1914. German money was associated with a good many British enterprises then, and the advocates of a Free Trade *Times* were not too proud to accept Anglo-German help if it would further their designs. The project might have grown into a serious menace to the continued existence of *The Times*—conceive the fate which would have befallen the newspaper at the outbreak of war if German names had figured among its proprietors!—it might have become a menace but for the action of Sir Ernest Cassel. He was asked to interest himself and his associates in the scheme, and he refused point-blank to have anything to do with it. From that moment the ‘German Syndicate’ could not command a sufficient amount of hard cash to contend pound for pound against Lord Northcliffe’s millions. They fell back on an offer of shares in a new company—to own *The Times*—and dropped into the Pearson category of those who wanted

to buy yet had not the wherewithal to purchase in cash.

We obtained a grip upon the operations of this Syndicate by one of those happy accidents which are more common in human affairs than even novelists dare to assume. If I were writing fiction I should not venture to invent the story of the Syndicate's approach to me, of all people, as their predestined supporter within *The Times* office. They had already provided themselves with an Editor, should their scheme come to fruition, and they looked about for a Manager who would be able to command some support among the staff of *The Times*. They were so good, and also so extremely foolish, as to hit upon me. One day I received a long communication from a firm which was representing the 'German Syndicate.' This letter began by informing me that a group of partners and their backers had decided to purchase *The Times* and would most certainly succeed in doing so; let there be no doubt about that. They were to be the winners in the great game of competition, and if I wanted to be on the winning side I had better join with them at once. As an inducement to join it was hinted, in rather truculent language, that I might be offered the position of Manager under the new proprietorship of the Syndicate.

I read this letter with feelings of considerable amusement. It imported an element of humour into what was rather a grim business for every old member of *The Times* staff. No man who has not been a

prominent member of a newspaper staff at a time of sale can conceive what it feels like to be bought and sold as if one were part of the office furniture. I had reconciled myself to be bought, as an animate part of the business, by Lord Northcliffe, but the notion of being thought purchasable by an opposition show amused me much more than it flattered my self-respect. This was the first occasion within my experience upon which anybody had tried to bribe me, and I was pleased to find that it was an experience more amusing than painful. What I did was to stroll over to the Manager's Room and to show my precious letter to Moberly Bell.

"Good," said he. "I have heard of these people. Now we have them."

It was arranged between us that I should reply as if I were prepared to consider the offer upon receipt of further particulars, and to go on asking for further particulars for as long as the representatives of the Syndicate would stand the game of 'spoof.' So I wrote diplomatically, and there followed quite an agreeable little correspondence. I kept the Syndicate dancing to my pipe for some weeks, and Bell saw the whole correspondence. He communicated it to Lord Northcliffe, and the information which I obtained proved to be extremely useful. What is more it confirmed Lord Northcliffe in his determination to buy *The Times* whatever it might cost.

I have referred to Lord Northcliffe's conviction of the German Peril, and to his insistence that all papers under his control should keep that peril steadily before

the British public. He now saw himself as the instrument designed by Providence for saving *The Times* from being bought by a 'German Syndicate,' and being turned to the purposes of German war propaganda. His imagination took fire. He pictured himself as an English St. George in shining armour doing battle with a German Dragon for the life of the virtuous maiden about whose waist was girt the label of *The Times* newspaper. Bell encouraged this handsome vision of what was really not a very formidable opponent. Some months later, forgetful or ignorant of the part which I had played in the affair, Lord Northcliffe told me all about it in a coloured version which I found highly entertaining. In his hands the 'German Syndicate' swelled to the dimensions of the Kaiser and the hidden resources of the German Empire which he, St. George, had brought to naught all by himself.

"I saved *The Times* from the German Emperor," he declared magnificently.

"Splendid!" cried I, with enthusiasm. One needs to humour these millionaire newspaper proprietors.

CHAPTER XX

THE NORTHCLIFFE PURCHASE

By the middle of February the lists were set, and we knew what proposals for the purchase of *The Times* had been put before the Court of Chancery in the case of *Sibley v. Walter*. They were now three in number: the Pearson scheme, the 'German Syndicate,' and Moberly Bell's contract with General Sterling. So far Moberly Bell was a sure winner. He had already put down £32,000 as a stake for the carrying out of the Sterling contract, and was prepared, as we have seen, to pay into Court at any moment more than the whole of the £320,000 in cash which the contract secured to the partners in *The Times*. The backers of the two competing schemes had little to offer except hypothetical shares in companies still to be formed, and no Court responsible for approving a sale will look at shares when it is offered hard cash. So the Moberly Bell offer, behind which were ranged the unlimited resources of Lord Northcliffe, was certain to receive the "approbation of the Judge" when the last tussle came. I do not know how far Lord Northcliffe would have gone had competi-

tion become acute. I have seen a letter in which he mentioned £360,000 as an outside sum, but this is inconsistent with his own subsequent statement to me that he would have defeated the 'German Syndicate' at any cost. What he most feared was premature publicity, for his chance of buying *The Times* as cheaply as he did was dependent upon keeping the identity of himself as purchaser closely covered up. To all appearances the purchaser was Moberly Bell, who was buying on behalf of himself and the staff of *The Times*. It was obvious that someone with a much deeper purse than managers and editors of newspapers are able to carry about was standing in with Bell, but there was nothing to indicate that this someone was Lord Northcliffe. His newspaper lordship was "somewhere in France" resting from business and ostentatiously indifferent to the fate of *The Times*.

Mr. Walter did not know until the 8th of March, nearly a month after the formal signature of the Bell-Sterling contract. He had submitted himself to the personal influence of Moberly Bell and had accepted Bell's assurance that, whoever might be the purchaser, every care had been taken to provide that *The Times* would be continued upon its old traditional lines. The terms upon which the Walter printing business was to be acquired were communicated to him as part of the conditions of purchase. Mr. Walter did not give any trouble, and Godfrey Walter was left to go on with the Pearson scheme until wiped out by the decision of the Judge. It was Lord Northcliffe who instructed

Moberly Bell to reveal his identity to Mr. Walter on March 8th, a few days before the case came into Court. His message conveying this instruction to Bell showed a nice sense of personal honour. He stated that he had returned from the Continent because he had learned directly from an acquaintance of Mr. Walter that he had given assurances that Lord Northcliffe was not the person concerned in the offer that was before the Court of Chancery. Under these circumstances Lord Northcliffe could not allow Mr. Walter to remain in ignorance of his identity.

"I beg," continued Lord Northcliffe's instruction to Bell, "that you will at once therefore inform him, and that you will provide me to-night with a letter from him intimating his cognisance of the fact. In the interests of the anonymity of the paper I think that this information should be confined to Mr. Walter only."

The last sentence in Lord Northcliffe's instruction is in singular contrast with the rest of the message, which has a ring of genuine good feeling and sincerity. That last sentence cannot be taken seriously. The information was not confined to Mr. Walter only "in the interests of the anonymity of the paper," but in the interests of a smooth passage for Lord Northcliffe's purchase scheme. Then, and for years afterwards, he kept himself in the background. All his interests in *The Times* were held by nominees, and he did not appear in person as either a shareholder or as a director until his proprietorship was four years old. His identity as the chief proprietor of *The Times* had by then

become so generally known that there was no further purpose to be gained by "anonymity."

Lord Northcliffe, in those years of his intellectual prime, fully realised how inconvenient, and even dangerous, newspaper publicity may be to newspaper proprietors. If the Press is to exert any serious influence as the expression of public opinion then the proprietors of newspapers must resolutely remain anonymous. It is fatal for them to appear openly as the pullers of strings so that the public may dance. One of Lord Northcliffe's strictest rules when he was at his best was that his name should never be mentioned in any of his papers unless by his own instructions. He maintained that rule, and his own substantial anonymity, until the year 1915, when, under stress of the excitements of war, he began to come into the open as the controller of opinion in his newspapers. Once the sound rule of personal seclusion had been broken Lord Northcliffe rushed to the opposite extreme, and in the years of his lamentable decline his name and exploits pervaded his own journals. When I saw this lust for publicity grow upon him—the man whom I had known at his best—it was plain to me that the Northcliffe of 1908 and 1909 no longer existed. The Lord Northcliffe of his latest years was not the Lord Northcliffe whom I had known. He was not the Northcliffe who showed so careful a regard for Mr. Walter's personal honour, nor the Northcliffe who, rejecting the counsels of prudence, handed over £320,000 to Moberly Bell as a plaster for his sore heart.

Cautiously guided and lubricated the Bell-Sterling contract for the purchase of *The Times* went through the Court on oiled wheels. It secured the approbation of the Judge on March 16th, seven days being allowed to the opposition schemes for entering appeals. On the afternoon of the seventh day, March 23rd, I was standing with Moberly Bell in the Manager's Room at Printing House Square. He was looking at the clock. No notices of appeal had been put in, and as the hands of the clock reached the hour for the rising of Mr. Justice Warrington's Court Bell pointed dramatically at the clock face.

"Look," said he. "It is the hour, and I have bought *The Times*."

It was true. He had won the game and bought *The Times*, and for a month or two it remained his legal property, held in trust, just as the 320,000 golden sovereigns had been his legal property, held in trust. Then he transferred all his interests to *The Times* Publishing Company Limited, the company which under very different shareholders owns *The Times* to-day. The private partnership after a century of duration had come to an end, an end so violent that it totally destroyed the Walter control upon which the partnership had originally been founded. Moberly Bell himself, Buckle, all of us, had been sold with the sale of *The Times*. We had ceased at that moment when Bell pointed to the clock face to serve the Walters; we had become the servants of Lord Northcliffe.

Bell hobbled over to his chair and sat down heavily.

He looked up at me and sighed rather wearily. "The easy part is finished," said he. "Now we've got to keep Him in order."

More than once I have been asked what sum precisely Lord Northcliffe and his associates paid in cash for the copyright of *The Times* and for all that pertained to it. He did not buy the buildings, and his issue of Second Preference shares in the new company to the Walter owners of the printing business and obsolete plant was a measure of compensation to them rather than a purchase in any business sense. The Walter brothers took £150,000 in those Second Preference shares though their plant was valued at little more than £8000.

In so far as I am able to ascertain the purchase of *The Times* cost Lord Northcliffe, and those who stood in with him, just £300,000 in cash. For that sum he bought out the partners who did not accept First Preference shares, he provided the £100,000 of working capital in accordance with the Bell-Sterling contract, and he met the expenses of the proceedings in Court and of the formation of the company. At the beginning Lord Northcliffe's own interest was fifty-one per cent.; later on he bought out his associates so that at his death practically the whole of the Ordinary (controlling) shares were owned by him. With these later developments I am not concerned. The sum deposited for buying out the former partners was that £320,000 of which the temporary sole possession gave so much gratification to Moberly Bell. Upwards of fifty of the

partners took First Preference shares, the remainder elected to be paid off in cash. About £140,000 of these First Preference shares were allotted to former partners, so that the balance of the £320,000—£180,000—had to be applied in paying off the remainder who thus ceased to have any further connection with *The Times*. That process accounts for £180,000 of Northcliffe cash. Then there was the £100,000 of working capital, making the draft upon cash £280,000. If we allow £20,000 for expenses and put the total of the bill at £300,000 we shall approximate to the truth.

The Times, at the date when it was purchased for this small sum, had few liabilities of any moment—except its annual subsidy to the Book Club—and few debts. It was not making much money, nor was it losing money at that time. By putting down, out of the working capital, a new modern printing plant the Northcliffe proprietors secured to *The Times* the large margin between the true costs of printing the paper by latter-day methods and the high charges levied under the Walter printing contract. Even Bell, who had become sceptical about the earning power of *The Times*, when it had not an *Encyclopædia* to subsidise it or a Book Club to attract subscribers, even Bell gasped when we worked out the final figures together. “What a bargain!” exclaimed he. It was. About the biggest bargain in newspaper purchase—when one considers that a first-class newspaper has intellectual and moral values transcending those measurable by figures

—about the biggest bargain which the modern Fleet Street has ever heard of.

The formation of *The Times* Publishing Company proceeded smoothly. The Court in April confirmed the Bell-Sterling contract under which Moberly Bell was the nominal purchaser, Bell assigned all his interests in this contract to the Company, the Walter brothers accepted the terms offered to them, and *The Times*, both as a newspaper and a printing business, was duly incorporated. After nearly a century of vicissitudes, of success and of failure, the old partnership, the Walter domination, and the Walter printing contract all had come to an end together. Incorporation, which might have been brought about peaceably ten or twenty or thirty years earlier, had been forced upon the Walters by legal process, and they fell with the Constitution which had at long last crashed about their ears. What I have tried to make clear is that the violent breach with the old order, the introduction of a Northcliffe proprietary, was wholly unnecessary. It was forced upon *The Times* by the blindness of those to whom its destinies had been entrusted. A hereditary monarchy, absolute in principle and feeble in practice, had proved itself incapable of coping with the ever-varying problems of a newspaper property. To this extent the Walter brothers must be held responsible for the lamentable ending of their *régime*. Had they co-operated with Moberly Bell instead of putting upon him a glaring public humiliation, and so driving him into open war with them, the issue of the proceedings in

the Court of Chancery might have been very different. The hereditary control of the Governing Proprietor must have gone—it was outworn—and the Walter printing business must have gone, but new working capital, for lack of which *The Times* was languishing, might have been introduced without bringing with it a complete alien control. The figures which I have given show how relatively small was the sum needed to buy out those of the old partners who desired to go, and to provide capital sufficient to re-equip the newspaper as a going concern.

I do not blame Moberly Bell for the course which he took. Time was against him. He was confronted with the possibility of a Pearson purchase which must have been disastrous to *The Times* and to all who served *The Times*. At all hazards he had to defeat the Pearson scheme. Almost at any moment after that announcement of January 7th, 1908, which declared war upon him and upon his colleagues, the Pearson scheme might have been laid before the Court of Chancery for its approval. He must, if it were to be defeated, have a strong alternative ready within the shortest time available. He had it ready within a fortnight. It was an astonishing feat for a man who had been cut off and abandoned by his employer, though he had never been formally dismissed. Looking back now after all these years I do not see how Moberly Bell could have declined to take the hand which Lord Northcliffe stretched out to him. I am quite certain that he did not give his powerful assistance to Lord

Northcliffe in order to secure his own brief future. Lord Northcliffe himself was so impressed by Bell's disinterested devotion to *The Times* and to the colleagues who trusted to him as their champion, that he could not conceal his admiration. Again and again he has told me how different was the Bell whom he found from the Bell whom he expected to find. I was at Moberly Bell's side almost every day all through those months of January, February, and March, and for fifteen months thereafter I was his closest of fellow workers on the management side. His one thought up to the moment of sale to himself was always how he could save *The Times* from the Pearson menace, and from the Walter control which he had come profoundly to distrust. After the sale his one thought always was how he should save the soul of *The Times*, and the colleagues who were the guardians of that soul, from the dangerous purchaser whom he had put in possession of the body and soul of *The Times*. The responsibility for his own actions lay heavy upon him and, beyond doubt, gravely shortened his life. Yet if those early days of 1908 had to be lived through again—with the knowledge which we had then, not with the knowledge which I have now—I think that Bell would have done again what he did then, and that I should have helped him again as I did then.

A few months since, in order that I might refresh my memory of those events of sixteen years ago, I turned up the official file of *The Times* Publishing Company

Limited which reposes in the Companies Registry. And as I went through the documents I pictured to myself the bewilderment of an historian—say of a hundred years hence—who sought from these ‘original records’ to compile a history of the sale of *The Times* in the early months of 1908. He would find the Bell-Sterling contract, and the deed under which Moberly Bell assigned his interests in that contract to the Company, but he would be quite incapable of discovering by whom, and for what consideration, *The Times* had been purchased. The documents indicate, as they were artfully designed to indicate, that *The Times* was bought by Moberly Bell and was transferred to a company which had, as directors, prominent members of the staff of *The Times* with Mr. Walter as chairman. Capital was clearly introduced by some one, but there is no vestige of evidence whereby that some one may be identified. A study of the shareholders’ lists would convey nothing. There is scarcely anyone living now except the firm of solicitors who prepared those documents, and the writer of this book, who is able to penetrate below the surface of that official file. I should like to read the story which the historian of the future would make out of it if all copies of this book had been destroyed and he had nothing except the file to guide him.

The original Board consisted of Mr. Walter, chairman; Moberly Bell, managing director; G. E. Buckle, Valentine Chirol, and W. F. Monypenny. Though Monypenny was not on the staff of *The Times* itself

he was employed by *The Times* in preparing the *Life of Disraeli* which was afterwards completed by Buckle. This was not the dummy Board which it appeared to be. Though the members of it could not control Lord Northcliffe they could exercise great influence over him and, in an emergency, put in operation checks which it would not be easy for him to overcome. He could not impose upon this original Board of well-known men any course which would have compelled them to resign in a body rather than have accepted it. So long as this Board remained—it was unhappily not for very long—the new Chief Proprietor could not have things all his own impetuous way. He was controlled by the fear of inconvenient publicity. No class of men more timorously dreads inconvenient publicity than newspaper owners and conductors who live by imposing it upon the rest of mankind.

I have analysed the list of First Preference shareholders. Fifty-six of them, holding about £140,000, were members of the old dissolved partnership who elected to take shares instead of the cash which had been offered to them under the Bell-Sterling contract. Among the others Sir John Ellerman was a genuine holder who, having nothing to conceal, did not cover up his identity. Moberly Bell appears (as a nominee), and there were several highly respectable gentlemen with addresses in the City of London who also held blocks of shares as nominees. The purchasers, who were behind Moberly Bell, had to take up the First Preference shares which were not allotted to the old

partners, but in order to veil their personalities from the rude public gaze handed the shares over—in the fashion customary in such cases—to nominees whose names conveyed nothing to anybody. I suppose that this practice is an evasion of the law which requires the names of shareholders to be filed, even of a private limited company as *The Times* was, yet the law does not appear to mind and could scarcely prevent it if it tried. The holders of the Second Preference shares, the Walter brothers, were genuine; they accepted these shares as compensation for the loss of their printing business.

It is when we come to the Ordinary shares, the shares which carried with them control over the company and *The Times*, that we see Northcliffe camouflage in its most illusive dress. It did not matter greatly who owned the First or Second Preference shares; it mattered very much indeed who owned—or rather who was put down as owning—the Ordinary (controlling) shares. The future historian, unfortunate man, will not find a trace of Lord Northcliffe or of his associates about the 280,000 of them. In the first instance £270,000 worth was allotted, of which £100,000 appears in the name of Moberly Bell. He artlessly suggested in one of his letters to "Dear Blank" that a majority of the Ordinary shares should be vested in his name so that at least he might possess nominal control over *The Times*; but Lord Northcliffe did not regard Bell as a safe repository for even nominal control. Bell might—he was quite capable of doing so in a serious emergency

—Bell might have exercised that control in defiance of Lord Northcliffe, and it would have been no easy task for the real chief proprietor to have ejected him and remained “anonymous.” So Bell was allotted no more than £100,000, and Lord Northcliffe’s interest of fifty-one per cent. was assigned to three nominees who had no concern with *The Times* and could be depended upon to carry out their employer’s instructions. “I always hold the controlling interest of fifty-one per cent. in all my companies,” said Lord Northcliffe to me while explaining his position of supremacy. There were two genuine holders of Ordinary shares in the original file, and two only. One was Mrs. Moberly Bell who held £5000, and Sir John Ellerman who held £26,500—one-tenth part of the purchasers’ holdings of £265,000. The other nine-tenths were held on behalf of Lord Northcliffe and his associates in the Harmsworth Press. The amount in cash paid for the whole £265,000 in Ordinary shares was the £100,000 provided as working capital. If we regard the sum paid for First Preference shares as the business investment which it really was—those shares afforded excellent security for the money—the Northcliffe group and Sir John Ellerman bought the control of *The Times*, with all that control involved, for the derisory amount of £100,000 in cash.

CHAPTER XXI

THE NORTHCLIFFE INFILTRATION

LORD NORTHCLIFFE purchased a controlling interest in *The Times* in order to attain an eminence among newspaper proprietors to which he had long aspired, not so that he might achieve any definite purpose in its conduct. I, and many others, have sought to peer into his mind, to ascertain what he would be at in piling up newspapers and periodicals in bewildering variety, and we have all failed because Lord Northcliffe did not know himself. He was certainly not impelled by a vulgar lust for money, though it happened incidentally that money flowed in upon him in a veritable Niagara. He was a man singularly free from the vulgarities of newly won riches. I have not seen his house at St. Peter's in Thanet, but Bell told me that it was little more than a cottage and was, in fact, the first home of his own which Lord Northcliffe had ever bought. He never owned what might be called a country estate. He leased a lovely Elizabethan house at Sutton Place, near Guildford, over which I have wandered with him as my guide, and I was struck by the simplicity and



Photo. by Wykeham Studios, Ltd.

THE AUTHOR AT THE PRESENT DAY

excellence of the taste displayed in all its appointments. His London home in my time was in St. James's Place, a charming small house overlooking the Green Park and standing on what was one of the quietest and most secluded sites in West London. If we set aside the dozen or more busts of the Emperor Napoleon—upon whose appearance in his later years Lord Northcliffe modelled himself—there was nothing freakish or ostentatious about St. James's Place. The thin long-haired Napoleon of the Italian campaigns, with glittering hypnotic eyes, eyes which even in the portrait at Dalmeny strike an observer into awed silence, did not appear in Lord Northcliffe's collection. His own plumpness was more in harmony with the Napoleon of David's portraits.

Lord Northcliffe had no expensive tastes unless one can call an early passion for motor cars an expensive taste in a man so extremely wealthy. He did not go in for horse racing, or for yachts, or for gambling. He was a North-country Irishman of Puritan upbringing who never shed in prosperity his essential Puritanism. His reputation has always been free from private scandals, a circumstance in itself remarkable in one who achieved vast wealth at a very early age. The triviality, the commonness, of so many of his papers with their enormous circulations among the young men and women of Great Britain might make one groan, yet their triviality was the worst to be said of them; they were never licentious. Lord Northcliffe would pander to the public taste in most things, but he would never

permit his papers to outrage his own engrained Puritan instincts. He was not, as some have declared, a genius without a soul, yet it was a curiously childish undeveloped soul which was conjoined to his quite exceptional intellect. But though he had a soul of sorts, and was capable of great generousities, Lord Northcliffe was most certainly a Genius without a Purpose. He could establish the newspapers or periodicals which appealed to his own unfurnished mind, and make them pay as no man had ever made ephemeral literature pay before his time, yet when they had been established he did not in the least bit know what to do with them except to go on making them pay. That, I venture to think, was the tragedy of his life. He cared little for money, yet it was the one thing which he was supremely competent to make. And when at the summit of his career he bought *The Times*, and was filled with vague aspirations about making it the 'best' paper in the world, he failed because he did not know what was 'best' and would not be taught by those who did. He had no standards. So that after the hot fit had passed, and the achievement of what was the 'best' eluded him, all he could then think of was how to make *The Times* pay. I can picture to myself his bewildered exasperation. He had money in superfluous chunks already, he could not from his manner of living have spent a fifth part of his income, and yet all he could seek to achieve with his latest newspaper toy was to make more money. I do not know that he himself made much money out of *The Times*—though

his estate did—he certainly made nothing else out of it.

As I watched Lord Northcliffe trying to understand *The Times* and its staff and its readers, and failing to comprehend what its purpose was in the view of those who loved and served it, the truth was borne in upon me that no man can conduct a newspaper with a mind at rest and content unless that mind of his is in tune with those of the class of people to whom it is designed to appeal. There was this of merit about the later Walters—who in other respects let down the poor old *Times* so disastrously—that they did understand its purpose far more clearly than ever did Lord Northcliffe, their technical and intellectual superior in other respects. The English ideas of education as expressed in its public schools and Universities may be absurd and effete—I have no desire to discuss them—nevertheless they are definite and are inspired by a definite purpose. *The Times* had always been a newspaper conducted by educated people for educated people—according to English standards. And no one can understand men and women educated by English standards unless he himself has been subjected in youth to the same educational influences. It does not alter a fact to condemn it as the outcome of a caste system; rather it emphasises the fact, for nothing is so incomprehensible as a caste system to those who do not belong to it. *The Times* was a caste newspaper, and Lord Northcliffe did not belong to the caste. The most appropriate epithet which I can think of to apply to his mind is that which I have

used already; it was unfurnished. He had never been educated in the English sense, he had never had his nose held to the grindstone of any branch of learning, he had never lived on equal terms of mutual criticism with those who had been educated on English lines. This may have been to his pecuniary advantage, but it was a fatal disability for one who sought to influence the conduct of so characteristic an English newspaper as *The Times*. Its ideals were to him utterly foreign.

I would sooner have had Horace Hooper (of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*) in possession of a controlling interest in *The Times* than I would have had Lord Northcliffe. For it was one of Hooper's great merits that he clearly realised his deficiencies. He was an American who revered English scholarship because he had none of it himself. In the eyes of Hooper the Editor of *The Times* was of the intellectual stature of a god. Just as Horace Hooper never ventured to interfere with Chisholm's literary control over the *Encyclopædia Britannica* so Hooper would never have ventured to interfere with the control of Buckle or Moberly Bell over the editorial staff and conduct of *The Times*. Hooper, intellectually small beside Lord Northcliffe, was in soul his superior. What Lord Northcliffe did not understand he disliked; what Hooper did not understand he was willing to admire. Hooper's admiration for *The Times*, even of the 'nineties, was boundless.

Kennedy Jones, whose influence over the changes made in *The Times* after the Northcliffe purchase counted for a good deal, ranked somewhere between

his Chief and Horace Hooper. Kennedy Jones had some comprehension of the ethical purpose of *The Times* and a reluctant respect for it. When I hinted as delicately as I could that men who were accustomed to Harmsworth standards would find difficulty in catering for the readers of *The Times*, K. J. assented, yet expressed his confidence that they would succeed. "All that we have to do," said he, "is to give the readers the best of everything—the best Law reports, the best Parliamentary reports, the best book and art and dramatic criticism that there is, the best City news, the best Foreign news, and so on. That is all." "Quite so," I agreed. "But who is going to tell you what is the best?" I understood from K. J. that he was willing to be instructed by those who knew; the trouble with Lord Northcliffe was that he was not willing to be instructed by anybody. Because he was successful in running newspapers for readers with unfurnished minds like his own, he thought himself capable of running *The Times* for readers whose minds were furnished in a fashion, though Lord Northcliffe did not understand what that fashion was. He used to talk to me about the old readers of *The Times* as if they dwelt in a world which he had never explored. They bewildered and exasperated him.

For a short few months after the Northcliffe purchase had been completed Printing House Square was a happy home for the old staff. We had rid ourselves—or rather Moberly Bell had rid us—of the Walter constitution and the hereditary Walter printing business,

and we stretched our limbs as slaves do who have cast off their fetters. We had entered upon a new and more oppressive slavery, but of that we were not yet fully conscious. Lord Northcliffe at the beginning bubbled with enthusiasm and amity. In his own words he was the chief among those who had the interests of *The Times* at heart, and he had conceived in his wayward fashion a genuine affection for Bell. And Bell for him. Lord Northcliffe never came to the Square—he never once entered its doors during my time—for he was full of apprehension lest his ownership should become advertised to the world; he stayed away and wrote letters to Bell encouraging him to get on with the good work of making *The Times* a shining jewel among newspapers. He cried to Bell to spend money freely, and not to waste time in any more devices of penurious economy. And Bell, who had been ‘squinchng’—a useful portmanteau word—in every direction for years, had been squeezing and pinching to make the revenue fit the expenditure, revelled for a while in the delights of spending. He wrote to Northcliffe as often as Northcliffe wrote to him—they were now ‘Dear Bell’ and ‘Dear N.’ to one another. I who saw this correspondence occasionally used to chaff Bell about it and ask after “N.’s love letters.” When Lord Northcliffe was raised to the peerage he selected a title which would permit him to scrawl the Imperial Napoleonic initial at the foot of his letters. Bell, whose great interest was always in Foreign Correspondence, went the pace during that short hot fit of Lord Northcliffe’s enthusiasm. He obeyed the in-

junction not to regard economy, perhaps the more eagerly because after those long years of 'squincing' he was sick of economy. I, who had taken over office as Assistant Manager and financial watchdog, began to shiver when I saw the telegraph bills. I did some spending on my own account in those days, and helped to set up that Home News department of my dreams with its News Editor on duty by day and its reporters in early attendance to follow up events. So while Bell expanded the always generous Foreign News service I, in a much more modest way, paid regard to that department of Home News which had hitherto been so distressingly starved. Our Home News staff—a symbolical act—took over the room which had for many years harboured Godfrey Walter, manager of the now happily defunct Walter printing business.

Another hobby of mine, the regular make-up of the pages of *The Times*, was also put in hand at once, though it presented great difficulties. The Walter printing plant, with its Kastenbein typesetters and elderly presses, still had to be used while the new plant was in course of being installed. Neither Bell nor I had anything directly to do with this installation except to give all the help which we could to Lord Northcliffe's experts. A capable engineer, Mr. Bland, had charge and proceeded to equip the office with Monotype machines, and to put in hand the erection of a double-width Goss press. Mr. Bland was obliged, as the re-equipment proceeded, to 'axe' a large proportion of the Walter staff who became surplus to the new estab-

ishment. It was a most painful business for Mr. Bland and also for me. Old employees of the Walters, whose services had to be dispensed with, came to me with heart-breaking appeals for protection. I could do nothing, and would not have interfered with Mr. Bland even if I had been equipped with the power and knowledge to do so effectively. Under rather a cold surface Mr. Bland hid from the world a tender sympathetic heart; more than once I have seen the ice crack and the warm feelings of the man gush out. It was his task as the expert reorganiser of the costly Walter printing department to cut the old staff to suit the new plant, and he discharged his task as gently and fairly as could be. I have the more pleasure in writing this of Mr. Bland because the unhappy members of the Walter staff, who sought to play me off against him, inevitably contrasted my apparent gentleness with his apparent ruthlessness. In his place I should have done as he did, and I could not have done it more considerately than he did. Our relations were correct but not, I am afraid, cordial. He looked upon me as a competent editorial man who had been turned into an incompetent manager. On the whole I am inclined to agree with him. Never once since those fifteen months of management without power at Printing House Square came to an end have I regretted my return in 1909 to my true rôle as editor and author.

I never had it explained to me why Lord Northcliffe selected the Monotype machines for setting *The Times* instead of the more familiar Linotypes used by his own

other papers, and by practically all daily newspapers. The Monotype is a beautiful and most flexible type-casting system, excellent for books and for printing which does not call for great speed in make-up. But unlike the Linotype, which is a single system and which casts type in slugs or lines, the Monotype is a double system which first punches holes in paper—something like pianola rolls—and afterwards translates these rolls into type on separate machines, casting type in separate letters and not in solid lines. A process which requires, first the punching of paper rolls in a species of typewriter, and then the casting of individual letters of type in other machines operated by those rolls of paper, is inevitably slower than a single system such as the Linotype. It is also a more tricky job to collect up the produce of the Monotype casting machines, and to put it together into columns and pages for the paper, than it is to fling together the Linotype slugs. The really strenuous task of making up the paper was entrusted to Murray Brumwell, who strove gallantly against the inherent difficulties of the Monotype, and aged visibly in the process. From the first Brumwell put in hand one most excellent and revolutionary reform—revolutionary, that is, at Printing House Square though common form at every other newspaper office which I have seen. This reform was an editorial planning of the paper each afternoon so that all departments knew precisely how much space was assigned to them, and the case room knew exactly where every class of news was to be accommodated in the next morning's issue. One might as well set forth

to build a house without a plan as to put together a newspaper without a plan. From the day when Brumwell took over his most arduous duties *The Times* was at least planned as it never had been planned before. And the readers of *The Times* began to find their way about its massive pages as readily as they found their way about their own offices.

Though, as I have written, Lord Northcliffe never entered Printing House Square in my time his secretary used to visit us nearly every day, and we began to be conscious quite soon of that process of infiltration which had already been designed for our undoing. I should put, from my recollections, the duration of the Northcliffe hot fit of extravagant enthusiasm at about three months. That, I have since been informed, was a long spell of high temperature for a fit of Lord Northcliffe. After about three months the tone of "N.'s love letters" to Moberly Bell began to become querulous. He who had urged Bell to leave the stony paths of economy and to revel in expenditure began to reveal a nasty disposition to enquire about costs.

Lord Northcliffe applied an admirable system of weekly cost sheets to all his papers, and he applied that system to us. We were required to show exactly what we were spending in all the multifarious ways in which money is spent in a newspaper office. We were also required to show in detail the sources and amount of our revenue. As a man who has had a strict financial training I am wholly in favour of a sound costing system. Bell's vague estimates, on the backs of old

envelopes, of average costs per column, and of revenue per column, were worse than useless; they were dangerously misleading. But I was unfortunately at the wrong end of the Northcliffe costing system and failed to enjoy it as, by my own principles, I ought to have done. For it was my melancholy job to analyse the costs and, to some extent, to accept responsibility for the costs; it was Lord Northcliffe's much easier job to criticise the sheets which had been prepared. I could see, almost as easily as he could, how very vulnerable our sheets were to a critic who had passed through a hot fit and was beginning to get cold feet. We had obeyed, perhaps too literally, his injunctions to spend without ceasing, and the results when set forth upon ruled paper looked horrid.

On the editorial side Lord Northcliffe indulged himself at a very early stage in another of his pleasant devices. He was most tactful about it, yet I do not think that the Editor's Room was wholly mollified. Buckle and his Assistants were not without suspicion that what began in tact might end in rude interference. At an early hour of the morning it was Lord Northcliffe's habit to sit up in bed and to read all his papers, of which copies were specially brought to him. He would then call for secretaries and dictate to them the impressions made by his readings. He was extremely quick in his perceptions and in his judgments, some of which were admirably shrewd. Before very long these dictated impressions gained from perusals of *The Times* began to reach the Editor's Room by way of Moberly

Bell. I used to read them in course of transit. They were, as I have said, tactful performances, not a bit resembling those sour comments which the Chief sent to some of his other editors. Lord Northcliffe assured the Editor of *The Times* that he was not seeking to instruct him in his duties; all that he designed to do was to explain how each issue of *The Times* struck a serene and unbiased mind. He was not to be regarded as a proprietor who ordered but as a friend who suggested. Yet these daily outpourings of the serene unbiased mind of Lord Northcliffe—at six o'clock in the morning—were not soothing to the unserene and, perhaps, the biased minds of those who had struggled overnight with all the problems of daily newspaper production. There is nothing quite so easy as to criticise a daily newspaper—next morning; there is nothing so difficult as to get the thing to come right on the night of preparation. Many of the commissions and omissions to which Lord Northcliffe directed the Editor's attention were fully realised by the Editor himself hours before Lord Northcliffe awoke, sat up in bed, and proceeded to dictate his impressions. On the other hand, there were in those daily notes really valuable suggestions of which any editor would gladly avail himself—for Lord Northcliffe was the most keen-sighted journalist of his day in the valuation of 'news.'

The mistake made by Lord Northcliffe was not in the substance of his daily notes so much as in the manner of their communication. If he had wished—as I am sure that he did—discreetly to influence the ways of

the Editor's Room rather than to interpose as the Proprietor Who Must Be Obeyed, there ought not to have been any dictation of memoranda to secretaries and any sending of these serene unbiased comments to Printing House Square. He ought now and then to have conferred personally with the Editor and Capper and Richmond, to have canvassed their ideas and to have hinted his own, to have done everything which he sought to do in person and not in typescript. By his method he succeeded in rattling the Editor's Room without gaining its confidence. And so on the Management side. He succeeded, after the hot fit had passed, in rattling Bell and in rattling me much more than he guided us in the direction of his wishes. We all, in a sentence, began to find our new Chief Proprietor a damned nuisance. It was not going to be easy "to keep Him in order." Had he realised clearly what he wanted, and pursued a consistent policy, we could have shaped our course in harmony with his desires. But he passed from hot fit to cold fit, from enthusiasm to grumbling, and was consistent only in his inconsistency. And yet all the while there were qualities in him which were singularly attractive.

I saw a good deal of Lord Northcliffe in the summer of 1908. He used to send for me and talk to me in the frankest and most indiscreet fashion imaginable. What struck me most was his apparently complete disregard for reticence concerning the capacities and characters of his associates and of those who worked for him. My first meeting with him stands out vividly

in my recollections. I spent the whole of a brilliant hot day with him alone at Sutton Place and he talked continually for hours on end. He ranged over a multitude of subjects and persons—his brothers, associates like Kennedy Jones, his papers and their editors, Moberly Bell, the Walters, Buckle, the German peril, his own responsibilities as chief proprietor of *The Times*, his services to British journalism, and his anxieties about what would happen to *The Times* when he was no more. I was immensely attracted by him and immensely interested in his personality. He seemed at once to be so great and to be so small. He expressed the profound conviction that the true founder of *The Times* was the Second John Walter, and its greatest editor Thomas Barnes (1816-1841). He allowed merit in Delane, yet put him a long way below Barnes. The now almost forgotten John Walter the Second and Thomas Barnes were, according to Lord Northcliffe, the only men in the history of *The Times* who could bear comparison with himself. He declared his intention to repeat in the early Twentieth Century their triumphs of the early Nineteenth. When I enquired how he was going to set about it he became vaguely confident. He had certain clear ideas about circulation and advertisements—which he understood as well as any man living—but when I discussed with him editorial policy he went no further than a declaration that he was going to make *The Times* the "best paper in the world." When I hinted that his methods might repel old readers he scoffed and said that he would fill their places with multitudes of new ones.

He appeared to take no interest in a comparatively small circulation of educated readers; he aspired to hundreds of thousands. In all this no purpose could be discerned except the crude purpose of somehow piling up readers and advertisements. Money was nothing to him, he said—which was quite true—he was a “colossally rich man,” it mattered little to him whether *The Times* paid its way or not, and then—with glaring inconsistency—he hauled out one of those melancholy sheets of weekly revenue and costs, catechised me severely upon its details, and wanted to know exactly how expenses at Printing House Square could be instantly cut down. This was little more than three months after he had been urging Moberly Bell to spend without ceasing, and to give the Editor’s Room its head in the matter of home and foreign correspondents. Lord Northcliffe had an impressive grasp of detail and, I am afraid, I came rather badly out of his criticism of the cost sheets. He revealed a disposition to hold me responsible for them, and I dismally saw myself cast for the part of the frail nut between the steam hammer of Lord Northcliffe and the anvil of Moberly Bell. Though Moberly Bell was Managing Director, and I was a nobody, Lord Northcliffe then and there impulsively vested me with supreme authority to cut expenses to the bone. “Go ahead at once,” he commanded. “Never mind Bell.”

He really meant what he said, for it became apparent later that he purposed to apply a control over Printing House Square very much like that which the British Government enforced for many years in Egypt. Along-

side the Egyptian Ministers were placed British Advisers who were charged with the duty of keeping the Ministers under tactful direction. But if, on the Egyptian model, Lord Northcliffe really expected me to play the ludicrous part of 'Adviser,' in the Northcliffe interests, to Moberly Bell, the Managing Director, I am afraid that he was disappointed. Perhaps this is why later on he took the characteristic Northcliffe steps to squeeze me out. He had assented to my appointment as Assistant Manager to please Moberly Bell, though I was, from the first, in his way. What he wanted was an Assistant Manager appointed from among his own adherents who would represent directly the Northcliffe interests and the Northcliffe point of view. It was quite reasonable that the new proprietors should be represented in this manner, and had Lord Northcliffe told me his views at the beginning I should have stepped aside at once and remained in my old place on the editorial side. His plan of infiltration required the formation of a Northcliffe Party in Printing House Square, and the key position was the one which I held at Moberly Bell's side. I bear him no malice for squeezing me out—almost any other purchaser who wanted to exercise detailed control would have taken the same course—though it was put through in a fashion which not even the personal charm of Reginald Nicholson, my supplanter, could make agreeable.

Lord Northcliffe expressed anxiety about the future of *The Times* in the event of his own death. He explained to me that he had no direct heirs and, even if

he had, that he did not believe in hereditary businesses. New blood needed to be brought in at each generation to keep *The Times* alive and active. Thereupon, with the inconsistency which was in him so amazing and so entertaining, he solemnly propounded a scheme for turning *The Times* into a National Trust and vesting the controlling shares in the Trustees of the British Museum! He certainly expressed some doubts whether the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Speaker, and the other exalted Trustees would accept responsibility for a daily newspaper, even for *The Times*, yet he did not pause to imagine to himself the fate which would overtake *The Times* should they unfortunately consent. A daily newspaper conducted by the Trustees of the British Museum, on stern official lines, would be about as attractive as the 'London Gazette.' Lord Northcliffe discussed this fantastic scheme for quite a long time and seemed to be quite pleased with it. He said that he was prepared to endow the National Trust pretty handsomely. It would have needed to be propped by a fortune as great as his to have kept it from collapsing under its own dull weight.

It should be understood that this project of Lord Northcliffe's was wholly different from the present arrangement under which the Ordinary (controlling) shares in *The Times* Publishing Company Limited are vested in a Trust created by Major Astor and the present Mr. John Walter. Responsibility for the control and conduct of *The Times* remains in the hands of its Chief Proprietors, all that is transferred to the Trust is control

over the ownership of the shares. They cannot be sold or otherwise disposed of without the concurrence of the Trustees.

I would not condemn my worst enemy to the life which I led for the next twelve months during which Lord Northcliffe's cold fit kept me busy trying to keep pace with his daily fall in temperature. He took to writing letters to me ordering me, over Bell's head, to do this and that in reduction of expenses. All his information concerning *The Times* was at second hand, for he did not himself come to the office. More than once the pressure to which I was subjected, and my efforts to reconcile direct orders from the Chief Proprietor with my subordination to Moberly Bell, the Managing Director, brought me into collision with Bell. Had Bell not subdued his fiery temper in remembrance of our long friendship a grievous breach must have opened between us. He was himself being harried continually and was fighting in his own dauntless fashion to keep, at any rate, Lord Northcliffe's restless fingers off the editorial staff. Bell submitted to several dismissals of old servants on the management side, chiefly in the advertisement office, which I was directly instructed to put through. It was a filthy job; I shall carry the white faces of those stricken men with me to my grave—but one day he exploded, and in bitterness of heart reproached me with desertion. "I have fought with Northcliffe for your life," said he, "and now you also are siding with him against me." I cried out that this was the last unkindest cut of all and offered my instant

resignation. Bell softened at once, withdrew the horrid charge, and we stood for a while miserably unveiling our tortured souls to one another. My plight, he agreed, was worse than his own, for he had a legal status and a definite contract of service with the new Company, while I had no status, no authority, nothing. When I was first appointed Assistant Manager I busied myself in preparing plans for what I conceived to be the benefit of *The Times*, and assumed authority for carrying some of them out, but Lord Northcliffe's cold fit rapidly chilled all my enthusiasms. I had become nothing more useful than a bit of driftwood flung to and fro by the waves of Lord Northcliffe's changeful humour. This man, though he was capable of great generousities, could torture those who served him without giving a thought to the pain which they suffered. He was to me like a boy pulling the legs off flies.

"I have a five years' contract as Managing Director," said Bell when—had we been of Latin blood—we had reached the stage of weeping upon one another's hairy necks. "Don't leave me before you are driven to it. I will stand by you, but don't carry on any backstairs correspondence with Northcliffe."

"How can I help?" I wailed. "His secretary is in and out of my room every day, and whenever I kick——'s verbal instructions are reinforced by letters from his Chief. The bombardment never stops."

Bell shrugged his shoulders and laughed ruefully. The sense of humour in both of us was getting overstrained and losing resilience. We had begun by laugh-

ing at 'Him' and rather enjoying his ways ; He had come to making us laugh, as they say in Devon, "on the other side of our faces." Bell and I agreed to stick together, to exchange full confidences, and to make the best of what for the senior members of the old *Times* staff was becoming a very bad job. I am happy to remember that afterwards, to the day of our parting, no further shadow arose between Bell and me. It was significant that our old joyous personal battles had ceased. They had been great fun, but we had passed out of the mood for sham fights. There were too many real ones to be fought. Bell, the splendid old warrior, was ageing and the steel of his spirit was losing its temper. The valves of his fleshly heart were giving warnings of trouble, and as his crippled feet grew weaker and more full of pain his big body tended to increase in bulk. In the physical as in the moral sense the year 1908 marked the crisis of his life.

As Moberly Bell's health failed him and his mental worries increased in severity he softened in his attitude towards life and towards the staff whom in the past he had ruled with severity. His greatest anxiety was now for their welfare. It gratified him very much to take over the private house of the Walters in the Square and to transform it into a staff club. A lady—one of four sisters with a famous name who had been born and bred in my own Devonshire village and whom I had known in their girlhood—was so kind as to help us, and to teach us how to run our new club. She gave us an excellent send off, and I am told that the club still

flourishes. In an enterprise of this kind Lord Northcliffe was most helpful and sympathetic. In my early years of night duty we used to bring up sandwiches to keep us going throughout the long hours of duty; now the staff were able to dine in comfort at hours convenient to the service of the paper at prices calculated to cover the bare cost. Bell and I lunched in the club nearly every day and made it our business to see that it gave of the best at the lowest possible charges. Bell had always been accessible, but he was immensely feared; now in his mellow age he was feared no longer. All the members of the club were one happy family, official rank counted for nothing; our mess in Printing House Square, with its friendly chaff and its disrespect for the wise and eminent, resembled nothing in London so much as the billiard room of the Savile Club after lunch or after dinner. Bell, the Managing Director, was just one of us, and my friends—who had never before had an opportunity to learn and appreciate his human qualities—would wonder why they had been accustomed to look upon the ‘Manager’ as a fearsome beast. From the newly won love of the staff, for whose sake he had brought in Lord Northcliffe, Bell drew much solace in those closing days of his troubles and anxieties. The more nearly he drew towards them the keener became his apprehensions of what might be in store for them when his own five years of high office should come to an end. He had then no reason to apprehend that death would interpose after precisely three years.

When I look back now upon that most unhappy

period in my life it seems to me that most of the unhappiness sprang from Lord Northcliffe's unwillingness or inability to give us of his full confidence. He had become too much of the autocrat, and we of the Management and Editorial sides came of a stiff-necked English class which does not bend meekly before an autocrat. We all recognised the genius of the man and were most anxious to work in harmony with him, but we refused to be bullied by any man living. Had not Lord Northcliffe by too early a success in his enterprise and by too complete a withdrawal from the invaluable benefits of every-day criticism, grown into a Napoleonic Chief Who Must Be Obeyed, he might have achieved durable work in Fleet Street and in Printing House Square. He broke upon the world of newspapers like a tempest, for a while he swept all before him—and thirty years after his death he will be as completely forgotten as have been other tempests.

From Moberly Bell and Buckle downwards we were all most anxious to help Lord Northcliffe in his difficult task of restoring the financial and moral fortunes of *The Times*. We never sought to obstruct him. On the side which was supremely his *métier*—the production, distribution and advertising departments of a daily newspaper—we fully recognised that, in comparison with his professional competence, we were but fumbling amateurs. Yet even on the business side, in which Bell and I welcomed all the help and guidance which he could give us, Lord Northcliffe did not take us into his confidence. And so it came about that his orders harried

without enlightening us. We could not see any purpose in his waywardness.

Let me give two examples. Lord Northcliffe was eager, and naturally eager, to improve the revenue of *The Times* from advertisements. He put in a brilliant young advertisement manager and urged me to give him all possible support—which I gladly did. A wise Chief Proprietor would then have left us alone while holding us personally responsible for the results. But Lord Northcliffe would butt in—there is no other word—and exasperate us. One of the most valuable advertising supporters of *The Times* was a leading firm of brandy importers who had run a campaign in the columns of *The Times* before the dawn of the Northcliffe era with results in business which appeared to be satisfactory. At any rate this firm wished to continue its advertising, and one day a full-page illustrated advertisement was submitted to me and accepted. It may not have been an artistic production, consisting as it did chiefly of a long vista of barrels—presumably filled with Three Star brandy. The page appeared in our issue—and Lord Northcliffe came down upon me in furious wrath. Never, he declared, had *The Times* been so utterly disgraced as by the acceptance of this page of barrels. It was in vain that I pointed out the previous acceptance of numberless pages from the same firm, in which barrels had prominently figured, and quoted my instructions to increase the advertisement revenue by legitimate means. Perhaps, rather injudiciously, I added that we “wanted money badly.” “Your excuse,”

flashed back Lord Northcliffe, "is that of a burglar or embezzler. Never take an advertisement because you want money." He then proceeded to declare that he did not like brandy and that, judging by the advertisements, the readers of *The Times* drank too much brandy already.

Then when Selfridge's began its dazzling career in Oxford Street with full-page advertisements in all the papers, a fine drawing by Bernard Partridge was sent in to us with instructions that it should appear upon a certain definite date. The idea of Mr. Selfridge was to make a great simultaneous splash in the Press. We had an excellent block made of the drawing and sent a pull to Lord Northcliffe, thinking that he would be pleased with it. Not a bit! He roared disapproval and ordered us to refuse it. To this day I cannot conceive why; it was an admirable and most artistic design worthy of its producer. The advertisement manager and I both tackled Lord Northcliffe without moving him by a hair's breadth, and *The Times* was the only daily paper in London which did not have a full-page advertisement of the opening of the Selfridge Store. Until then I had done all I knew to please him; from that moment I abandoned the task as quite beyond my poor capacities.

Kennedy Jones was much easier to get on with. He frequently visited us at Printing House Square, chiefly in connection with the installation and operation of the new printing plant. I liked 'K.J.,' and so did Moberly Bell. His attitude was perhaps that of an accomplished schoolmaster instructing two rather stupid children—

as we may have appeared in his eyes—yet he was always friendly and considerate towards our stupidity and our ignorance. Of course we were ignorant upon the printing side which, hitherto, had been the preserve of the Walters. ‘K.J.’ never bullied me for a reason which appeared one day. I said in relation to some printing details, “All this is outside my knowledge.” “Of course,” replied he; “you know nothing about it and there is no reason why you should. You are an editorial man and out of your native element.” It was truly and kindly said. I was out of my element. Later on, during my seven years in Glasgow, I taught myself quite a lot about printing and newspaper management, but in 1908-9 I was a mere beginner in a branch of newspaper production which was alien to my former experience. Still if ‘K.J.’ had been Chief Proprietor instead of Lord Northcliffe I should quickly have learned.

The culminating day of the new printing plant was May 23rd, 1909, when for the first time we proposed to print *The Times* on the huge Goss Press which had been installed by Mr. Bland in that lofty machine room at the Square which, from its timbered roof, we called ‘The Cathedral.’ The double-width Goss, with its electrical controls, extended right across the far end of ‘The Cathedral’ and may, for all that I know, stand there still. It was a very fine machine which at full running flung out folded and cut copies as fast as snow-flakes in a winter storm. On May 24th we were to publish an ‘Empire Supplement,’ the first of those colossal masses of articles and advertisements with which the

name of *The Times* became associated. The advance orders for this Supplement were enormous, in comparison with the ordinary sale of the paper, and it was, of course, made up and printed in advance of the date of publication. Mr. Bland, the expert official printer, could not keep pace with the orders, so that we had to ration newsagents and give them only a proportion of what they wanted to take.

Well, the 'Empire Supplement' was printed on the Goss, and the work turned out, both letterpress and pictures, won the admiration of 'K.J.' himself. He turned over the broad pages—there were forty-eight of them—in Moberly Bell's room and deservedly congratulated Mr. Bland. "But," added he, turning towards Bell and me, "is it not all rather inhuman? You can't expect anybody to read all that." I don't think that we bothered about people reading "all that" so long as they ordered it in larger quantities than we could supply. So far success, but it is always the unexpected that happens. On the night of the 23rd we went to press an hour earlier than usual so as to allow time for printing the big first edition of *The Times* which had to accompany the 'Empire Supplement' into the outer world. Then, as the occasion was an historic one in the Square, Bell and I went down to 'The Cathedral' to see the paper printed for the first time on the great mammoth of a Goss. The single-width Hoe machines of the Walter era, which were sprinkled about the room, looked like battered tramps in the company of a stately liner. Their day had passed,

though that night was to prove that it was not yet quite over.

I shall never forget that evening with its exasperation, its thrills, and its gusts of sardonic humour. The Fates were in a mood for sport, and let us know it quickly. We arrived, Bell and I, when it had been announced to us that the Goss stood ready clothed with plates and about to be run. It was electrically driven. Upstairs an emergency staff of packers waited beside vast piles of the 'Empire Supplement' to wed the Supplement to *The Times* and to convey both together to the Post Office vans. Outside the main publishing office the waggons of the wholesale newsagents were already assembling. The edition which was about to be printed far exceeded in quantity, though supplies had been rationed, any issue during my years at the Square, and the parcels for despatch would in volume be four or five times the weight of those containing an ordinary issue. Mr. Bland was present to superintend the proceedings in 'The Cathedral'; his pale face and glowing eyes showed that the occasion had stirred the emotions even of a professional engineer. He told us that everything was ready and Bell gave the word to start. We had seen the Goss running before—it had printed the 'Empire Supplement'—and we expected that the touch of a finger on an electric switch would be instantly followed by the low rumble, rising to an even roar, which was the cry of the Goss in action. But silence lay thickly about our ears. We could see the electricians conferring with Bland and shaking their heads. Some-

thing untoward had happened, I know not what, and the Goss would not move. Time went on. The experts overhauled wires and controls, they made several mysterious tests, now and then there would come a blue flash from the big switches—yet nothing disturbed the motionless placidity of the imperturbable Goss. It stood there, fully clothed with a double set of plates, massively immovable.

Time fled all too quickly. Messengers hurried in from my emergency packing staff and from the publishing office; the Post Office and the newsagents were clamouring for supplies and we were warned that the margin of time granted to us by the early going to press was slipping fast away. Presently we should start in vain, for the special newspaper trains would have departed without *The Times*. Then that happened for which the old Hoes had been sardonically waiting. Plates were stripped off the intractable Goss, other plates were rushed down the slide from the foundry, two Hoe machines were hastily clothed and summoned to save the paper which in the past they had served faithfully to the limit of their capacities. And nobly forgiving they responded instantly. They went off with a clatter which outclattered anything which I have ever heard in a newspaper machine room. They seemed to my over-strained nervous ears to be making ten times more than their customary row. They howled at us and chucked out copies exuberantly in the detached portions—the Inner and Outer Sheets—of which we had, in our Goss pride, thought to have seen the very

last. Somehow the issue was printed and got away; it was a frightful scramble, yet somehow the packers working with savage desperate energy got through and the trains were caught. It was the nearest thing that ever happened—a very near-run thing, as Wellington said of the Battle of Waterloo. And then at the end, as we turned to seek our waiting cars and go home to bed, Bell spoke :

“Couldn’t you hear the old Hoes chuckling?” asked he. That was the word, the *mot juste*, chuckling. And they had earned the right to chuckle themselves off their bedplates as soon as their right loyal task of saving *The Times* had been discharged.

When Moberly Bell drew up the Editorial Charter of *The Times*, and arranged with Lord Northcliffe, before his own nominal purchase of the copyright was effected, that the Board should consist of members of *The Times* staff, he was intent upon continuity after purchase. He could never have anticipated that the Northcliffe infiltration would proceed so rapidly as it did and that the Old Guard would have all gone, by death or retirement, in little more than four years. Bell’s own contract as Managing Director was for five years; his death after three years removed the most powerful and most vigilant of all the old watchdogs.

My own resignation was the first clean break with the past. My position at Bell’s right hand was the tactical key which opened Printing House Square to Lord Northcliffe once it had been occupied by one of

his own officers. I could not fail to see that the Chief Proprietor wished me gone, and was only restrained by Bell's support of me from speeding my going. It was in the spring of 1909 that he began to put into operation the characteristic strategy known as 'squeezing out.' He put in one of his former secretaries, a personally charming man named Reginald Nicholson, as a plain hint that my continued presence was unwelcome. It was done under a veil of polite camouflage to which neither I, nor Bell on my behalf, could take effective objection. Nicholson came, as Lord Northcliffe intimated to me, to represent his policy and wishes and to "assist me in my work." Nicholson was given no official position at that time. He was an 'Adviser' on the Egyptian model created by Lord Cromer. I should have politely withdrawn forthwith had not my own little niche—the 'Financial and Commercial Supplement' and my private connection in the City—been left as a legacy by me to my late pupil and assistant, 'Jack' Maughan. I could not, and would not if I could, have displaced Maughan from well-deserved promotion because I wanted his job for myself. It was a job of my creation, it is true, yet one which I had resigned willingly to him a year before. So before I packed up my traps and bade Printing House Square farewell I had to wait for a few months, in the spirit of Mr. Micawber, for something suitable to turn up. Had I chosen to bargain with Lord Northcliffe I expect that he would have paid me a substantial sum to make way for his representative. It was not in my view an

occasion for bargaining. Lord Northcliffe had a perfect right to be represented directly at Printing House Square instead of indirectly, and I did not question then, and do not now, the propriety of his desire for my departure. I should certainly have preferred the straight course of asking me to resign than the crooked device which he saw fit to adopt. I am grateful to him for sending me Nicholson with whom I became most friendly. If I had to play the part of Esau I could not have been assigned a kindlier or more honourable Jacob. Nicholson supplanted me with infinite tact and patience, and I hope that he will read this expression of my gratitude. In many ways my life became much more happy after his arrival. I was no longer the butt and whipping boy of the Chief Proprietor, and I could do as little real work as I pleased. I believe that had I gone on for years attending at the office in the nominal capacity of Assistant Manager and doing no work, and "drawrin' my pay reg'lar," Lord Northcliffe would not have troubled to enquire what I did for my money. He was a man of big generosities.

The end to my embarrassments came quickly and completely. The directors of the company which owned *The Glasgow Herald* asked Moberly Bell and Buckle to recommend an Editor. I knew about this for some weeks before I thought of myself as Editor of a Scottish newspaper. Then one day I walked into Bell's room. "I wish that I could find a really good man for the *Glasgow Herald*," said he. "The offer to — has fallen through." Then, in a flash of genius, I exclaimed,

"Why not recommend me"! Bell stared at me blankly. "It seems incredible," he murmured, "that I never once thought of you. Why, you are the very man; your experience of commercial journalism will be just what the *Herald* people want."

Bell wired at once to Scotland, within a few days one director came down and saw me, within a few more days the whole board came down—except one member who was in Canada—and I was appointed. It was arranged that I should take up office in Glasgow on September 1st. This was in June.

So my family and I packed up our traps and turned our faces to the North. Had I known how very different Scotland is from England, how like a foreign city Glasgow would be to the Londoner, I could not have entered upon my new job with the confident courage which I showed. Luckily I did not know, and, by the time that I had learned, familiarity with Glasgow had given me a newer and more durable courage. Glasgow welcomed me with boundless hospitality, and admitted me with sublime disregard of consequences to the brotherhood of Scotland. My seven years' work in Glasgow made of me a Scotsman in Scotland and an Englishman in London, and so I remain to this day. My wife and I loved the dear dirty friendly Glasgow and we love it still. I might have been to this day Editor of *The Glasgow Herald* if my daughter had not terrified me by developing a Glasgow accent!

My last official experience of Moberly Bell was exactly characteristic of him. Kennedy Jones, on behalf

of the proprietors of *The Times*, had made me a grant of three months' pay to cover the costs of my cleaning up and move. I reckoned that if I left Printing House Square at the end of July, and took the month of August as the holiday due to me, that my gratuitous three months' pay would date from the end of August and not from the end of July. I explained this to Bell. He grinned nastily, and looked exactly like the Moberly Bell who used to refuse me increases of my salary in the days of my apprenticeship. "No, you don't," said he. "I love you, my dear fellow, and I am most sorry to lose you, but you can't come over me like that. If you leave in July your three months' pay will date from July." I could have scored off the economical Bell by staying South during August and deferring my resignation until the close of that month, but this course would have been highly inconvenient. I had to get in touch with my new surroundings at the earliest moment. So I definitely left at the end of July and Moberly Bell saved just £125. "I would have done the same had you been my son," said he, and I fully believed him. As trustee for *The Times* he was a remorseless Brutus. I could easily have got the money out of 'K.J.,' but that would have been to have spoiled the rich flavour of my last clash with Bell.

CHAPTER XXII

THE END OF AN EPOCH

AT the end of July, 1909, I left London for Scotland, and my association with Printing House Square, which had lasted for fourteen years, came finally to an end. I did not myself see the dispersal by death and retirement of the Old Guard who, whatever may have been their human faults and disabilities, did uphold with unflinching courage the splendid imperishable traditions of the old *Times* of their devotion. I will, therefore, confine myself to a simple relation of the facts.

The original Board of Directors of *The Times* Publishing Company Limited, which was incorporated in 1908 to take over the property in *The Times* purchased in the name of Moberly Bell by order of the Court of Chancery, consisted of: Mr. Walter, Chairman; Moberly Bell, Managing Director; G. E. Buckle, Editor; Valentine Chirol, Foreign Director; and W. F. Monypenny. J. B. Capper and Bruce Richmond were Buckle's chief assistants on the editorial side, and I was Moberly Bell's assistant on the management side. My departure was the first break in the circle, and after that the dissolution of continuity proceeded rapidly. Mr.



Photo. by "The Glasgow Herald"

AN EDITOR AND HIS BEST FRIEND

Walter died in 1910 at the age of sixty-four. Moberly Bell fell dead from his office chair on April 5th, 1911, three days after his sixty-fourth birthday. In 1912 Buckle and Chirol both retired, and shortly afterwards Monypenny died. Richmond withdrew from his work as an Assistant Editor and devoted himself solely to the editorship of the 'Literary Supplement.' Capper remained for six months as a link between the old editor and the new one, and then himself passed into retirement. So that five years from the entry of Lord Northcliffe as the Chief Proprietor witnessed the complete disappearance of the personnel who had been responsible for the conduct of *The Times* during the previous régime. It was, no doubt, Moberly Bell's early death which precipitated a change which could not in any event have been long deferred.

As Editor of *The Glasgow Herald* I had an office and a considerable staff in London. It was frequently necessary for me to come South, and whenever I did so I walked round to Printing House Square and broke in upon my old friend and chief, Moberly Bell. At first it seemed that little had happened to change our relations. I would march in, climb that wooden staircase, and enter through the open door of the Manager's Room just as I had done hundreds of times before. Bell's great head would be thrust round the corner of his desk, his combative eyes would glare at me, and then came the softening glance and the welcoming hail. He looked older and not very happy, yet it was the Bell whom so many had hated and whom I had loved.

But there came a day when I was told that Moberly Bell was no longer in his old room. Then I was taken up in a lift to the top floor of that part of the Square which fronts Queen Victoria Street and introduced to a strange Bell sitting in a small strange room. This top floor had recently been vacated by the editorial staff of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* upon completion of the Eleventh Edition. Moberly Bell, though still the titular Managing Director, had been shelved and looked shelved. His elasticity of spirit, which had borne him through so many defeats and victories, had lost its old resilience. I came away sad at heart and I never saw him again.

I will not dwell upon events of which I have no personal knowledge. It is enough to say that the closing years of Bell's life were not happy ones, though, by a merciful dispensation, the actual termination of his career was peaceful and undimmed by foreboding. He had been much distressed at the failure of his Editorial Charter—of which I have told—to protect the Editor from increasing pressure, but about two weeks before his death these distresses left him. He became cheerful and confident, and his old ebullient self seemed to take on a new lease of life. On the day of his death he went as usual to his office, the room on the top floor where I had regretfully found him, and sat down to write letters with his own hand as he loved to write them. Then, in an instant, the weakened valves of his heart ceased to work and he fell dead from his chair. It was not a case of faintness passing into death for lack of

instant medical attention. He was dead when he fell, and nothing could have availed had the whole College of Physicians been present.

Lord Northcliffe, who was abroad, acted with the promptness and thoughtful kindness which characterised him at his best. He took by cable all those measures which do soften even the worst of blows and leave behind them grateful recollections. I am sure that he loved "old Bell" as he used to call him to me, and realised then as always how masterly an associate Bell had proved himself to be in the crisis of 1908.

Bell was dead, and with the death of Moberly Bell, the central figure of this book, my story comes to an end.

Moberly Bell died under the shadow of failure. And as the years went on it must have seemed to the survivors of his Old Guard that the soul of *The Times*, as they had known it, had been sacrificed to the material welfare of its body. In the skilled hands of Lord Northcliffe and of his associates the circulation increased largely and the revenue must have become far greater than Moberly Bell ever had at his disposal. But it was a *Times* with rather a shrunken, puny soul that was known to the world during the later years of the Northcliffe era. Then came the Rescue of 1923 and the Great Recovery.

When with respectful admiration I read *The Times* of to-day I can wish that my dear old friend Bell had lived to see it. With deep thanksgiving he would have thrilled to the revival of the old traditions, and would

have realised that the work in which and for which he had lived and died had at long last been accomplished. He would have known then that the soul which had seemed to sleep had sprung once again into new and glorious life. Moberly Bell's life ended, it is true, in Failure, but the cause for which he fought and died lived on, and we who survive are privileged to rejoice over that Success which has been the slowly ripened fruit of his tillage.

